

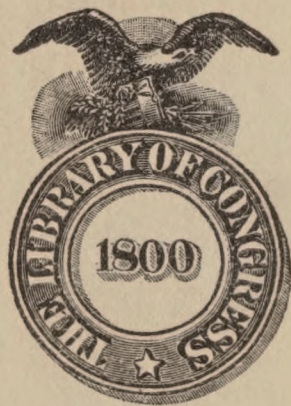
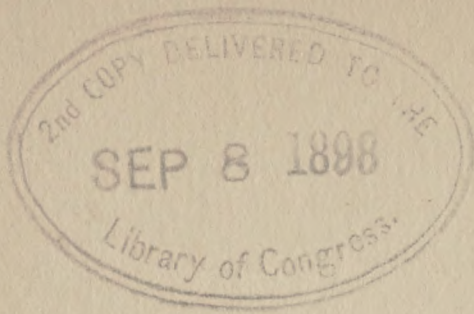
# GOOD AMERICANS

• BY •

• MRS. BURTON HARRISON •







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GOOD AMERICANS













"SHE BESTOWED A NOD AND SMILE UPON PETER DAVENANT."



# GOOD AMERICANS

*Harrison, Constance (Cary)* BY

MRS. BURTON HARRISON

AUTHOR OF "AN ERRANT WOOING," "SWEET BELLS OUT  
OF TUNE," "A BACHELOR MAID," ETC.



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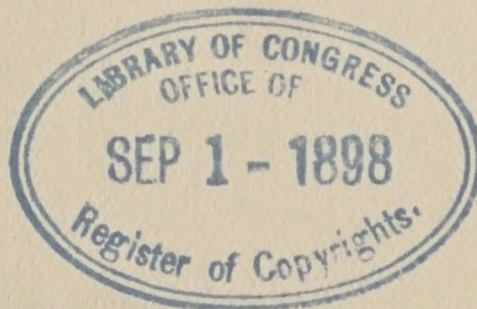


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MY TROOPER

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GOOD AMERICANS







# GOOD AMERICANS

## I



HEN we may depend upon you for the 15th?" said Mrs. Grantham, scarcely believing her good luck.

"So good of you to let me come," suavely answered her school-friend of former days—known to the world of fashion, of whom she was the starry leader, and to the other world in our broad continent that comforts its uninteresting existence by reading about the doings of a few New-Yorkers, as Mrs. Jack Stanley.

"I want to try to get together for you some really clever, cultivated people," went on Mrs. Grantham, a flush of excitement mounting to her cheeks.

"Do, dear; I love novelty," rejoined Mrs. Stanley. "Katrina, you have no idea how dull it is, night after night, meeting the same old set! When we are standing around, waiting for dinner to be announced, I sometimes wonder which of the men is going to pounce on me, and there's not an emotion in my being for one more than another. But what is to be done? It is



our fate. You know We are now building dining-rooms that will just hold Us."

Mrs. Grantham tried to laugh, but in her heart resented the magnificent assumption. For years Henrietta Stanley had been the fly in her ointment. The ambitious wife of a hard-working lawyer recently elevated to judicial honors, Mrs. Grantham, with her pleasant home and nice little family, should by rights have been contented to keep to her own busy, well-filled orbit, without coveting the periphery in which circled golden butterflies engendered by the luxury of modern New York.

But although it would have been to her a dreadful trial to live Etta's life, she did not care to think there was in her community any life she might not lead. Besides, Etta was only an accident of fortune. What had occasioned her, nobody asked; what inspired her distinguished exclusiveness, nobody knew; for her rather dull personality it was certain nobody cared.

The real reason of this attempt of Mrs. Grantham's to rake the coals from the ashes of her old friendship was a pretty little Miss Grantham, who was to swell the ranks of next season's débutantes. Everybody knows that a girl's coming out alters her family's mode of life and plans. If little Katty—as her father inelegantly persisted in calling their domestic treasure—had to be in society, it must be in the best there was, said her mama. And if Etta Stanley chose to make the effort, how much she might accomplish for Katty by a mere wave of her wand!

Thus, after a considerable interval of tepid half-intercourse with her quondam intimate, Mrs. Grantham,



putting her pride in her pocket, had gone that afternoon to call at the stately dwelling in which Mr. Stanley had enshrined the somewhat faded charms of his lady. She had found Etta at home to visitors, a fact that gave Katrina courage to be cordial. The hostess was ensconced in a gilt Louis XV chair with cream-satin cushions, in a salon like an outgrowth of Vudeen's emporium in Fifth Avenue for the sale of effects from foreign palaces.

Mrs. Grantham, who had been saving for some months out of her housekeeping money in order to purchase for her drawing-room a Morris arm-chair covered in flowery velveteen, had felt depressed at the outset by this trifling circumstance.

But an agreeable surprise awaited her. Etta had been recently attending a course of lectures on ethical culture, alternating in the ball-rooms of her set. Perhaps this contributed to her unwonted mood of agreeable acquiescence. Perhaps she had absolutely nothing else to think about. In any case, she had tried the experiment of being gracious with an old friend. She had inquired for Katrina's husband, daughter, and boys at school. She had offered one or two small anecdotes about her own absent children, and made some allusion to past days. And last of all, when Katrina, emboldened by the thaw in a long-frozen atmosphere, had asked her to dinner on the 15th, Etta had actually said yes.

The moment after, she had been overtaken by apprehension lest her acceptance was a mistake.

"They will be highly respectable frumps," she had said within herself. "I wish Jack were not going off



in the yacht for his West India cruise that day. He always knows what those people talk about."

"So *dear* of you to want me," she had murmured, nevertheless. "And you are going to get me somebody very nice?"

"I shall have Agatha Carnifex, to begin with," said Mrs. Grantham.

Miss Carnifex, viewed from every point, was unimpeachable. Family, fortune, cleverness, good looks, position—all were Agatha's.

"Agatha? Yes," answered Mrs. Stanley, with an amused little curl of the lip. "Her father, poor dear, is quite one of my pals. He says I rest him after his daughter's pyrotechnics of reform of the human race."

"Mr. Carnifex will certainly come. He is a great friend of my husband's," went on Katrina, with animation. "Besides, I want Agatha as well as you to meet my new young man."

Only the faintest flutter of interest stirred Mrs. Stanley's exterior.

"And who, pray, is he?"

The answer was interrupted by the arrival of another visitor—a tall, slim, exquisitely pretty girl resembling a French pastel, and dressed in a costume and hat of black velvet picked out with Russian sables, of which quiet elegance of attire Katrina Grantham made note before she had heard the wearer's name.

"Katty must have something like that next winter. The really smart people never overdress," she was inwardly saying, when Mrs. Stanley, in a sort of begrudging way, introduced to her "my friend, Miss Sybil Gwynne."



"Then I am not too late to make tea for you, dearest?" said Miss Gwynne to her hostess, tenderly.

"No, darling; Barnes is just fetching it," answered Etta, with an effusion entirely lacking in her talk with Mrs. Grantham.

"I had to drop in at Tilly's to hear her Russian violinist, or she'd have never forgiven me," went on the girl. "And after the last piece—to which nobody listened, they were in such a hurry to talk over Charley's engagement with Ethel—I beg your pardon," she interrupted herself, turning to the outsider. "This must seem very dull to you. I am sure I caught a much pleasanter sound when I came in. Were not you talking about some entirely new young man?"

"Mrs. Grantham was telling me of that *rara avis*," said Etta, yawning a very little. "Pray go on, Katrina, and tell Sybil, too."

"It was only that I hoped Etta might fancy meeting Peter Davenant," said Mrs. Grantham, deliberately, and with conscious pride in enunciating a name just now so interesting to the public.

But there was no responsive intelligence in the face of either hearer.

"Surely you have seen in the papers lately," she hurried on, "of the brilliant work he did in bringing about the conviction of Judge McStephen in the trial of his impeachment?"

"We have papers," admitted the hostess, languidly; "but Jack always keeps them in the smoking-room."

"I am afraid you will think us *very* uninformed," added Miss Gwynne, more tactfully; "but really we never heard of Judge McStephen."



"I forget that everybody is not as much at home in such matters as I must be," answered Katrina, with dignity. "And perhaps I was influenced by Agatha Carnifex having told me there was no one in town she wanted so much to meet as Davenant."

"Really?" said Etta, changing her right foot for the left upon her gilded footstool.

"He is a type of the best latter-day American, and looks like an 1840 'portrait of a gentleman,' with manners to match—old-fashioned and courtly—stands with his hat off in the street while talking to women—Sir Charles Grandison, you know—thinks all women are goddesses, or ought to be."

"Decidedly not *du monde*, then," interrupted the hostess, rearranging some roses that leaned toward her in a tall emerald-glass vase.

"I am afraid not of your world," said Katrina. "For years he plodded along in a subordinate position here, before an opportunity came to prove himself. Now, the wise men say, it 's only a question of time before he gets to the very top of the ladder. When he began, a stranger from a dead Southern town where he had been admitted to practice, he was poor as a church-mouse, and knew nobody. Now, though still poor, he is the most talked of among the youngsters of his profession."

"And a youngster means—?" asked Sybil, archly.

"A rising young lawyer till he is sixty, and after that a leader of the bar," answered Mrs. Grantham, smiling. "Davenant is about thirty years old, but in ignorance of worldly things; just a big, trustful, affectionate, headstrong, ardent boy. I'm sure the women



of society who would care to experiment on him would find him virgin soil."

The phrase, taking hold of Mrs. Stanley, caused her to sit up and forward, on her chair of state. The servants, coming in to light lamps, revealed her porcelain-tinted face with the near-sighted pale-blue eyes, under a mass of craped blonde hair, kindled with a faint animation.

"And I am to meet this paragon at dinner?" she said. "Don't fail to put him on one side of me, Katrina. And why can't you be awfully nice, and give poor Sybil, too, a chance at Mr. Davenant?"

"I shall be only too happy to have Miss Gwynne," said Mrs. Grantham, promptly, although at the moment she reflected that this would cut off one of the "duty" dames whom she had meant to work in on the occasion of entertaining Mrs. Stanley. After all, Miss Gwynne was so pretty, so fine of grain, so perfect a product of high civilization, it would always be a pleasure to have had her.

Sybil protested, but was overcome by Etta's rather too frank solicitations.

"Yes, dearest, you must go; I will take no denial; it will make it so much more—I mean I will call for you, and we can talk in the carriage coming home. Here is the tea at last; pray, Katrina, don't go till you have had some. And here come more people; I hope among them you may find somebody worth talking to."

That was an attractive gathering in the spacious drawing-room with broad windows looking over into the bare boughs and wintry sage-green reaches of turf



of the park opposite. The people composing it, including two or three well-authenticated foreigners, were easy, low-toned, well-bred, well-dressed without ostentation. In that each seemed to be in a place recognized by the others, it was in some respects the ideal society. Mrs. Grantham, who fell into conversation with a lively widow, Mrs. Arden, lingered on to hear what this lady had to say about Mrs. Stanley's delightful tea-maker, Miss Gwynne.

"Sybil is almost new to New York, last season being her first here. A niece of Mrs. St. Clair Lewiston, you know, with whom she lives. Educated altogether abroad, and has had unusual opportunities there, having been presented at half the courts of Europe. If poor Mrs. Gwynne had n't died in harness, so to speak, running around with her daughter to all the smart resorts of the Continent year after year, Sybil might never have known America. But she was an only child, and after her mother's death Mrs. Lewiston went out, and in time brought her back. What was it Paul Bourget called Sybil? The *fine fleur* of American aristocracy, I think, or some such phrase, that has stuck by her. She is adorably pretty and dainty; don't you think so? Rather too quiet, perhaps; but such graceful manners. As soon as Etta Stanley saw Sybil, of course she appropriated her for a bosom friend, and now they are inseparable. Etta finds something *chic* in a crony not exactly a foreigner, but who might as well be one for all she understands of her own country. But, then, who can predict what may happen? With this Revolutionary-Sons of the Cincinnati-Colonial Dames business all



over the place, patriotism may be 'in' again next year."

"My dear lady, what heretical sentiments!" said a smug, merry-faced gentleman of middle age, who now returned to them after setting down their tea-cups. "I'm sure I bank upon my nationality abroad—in England especially, where we're much more in vogue when a trifle startling, or at least dialectic. I heard, by the way, a kind lady, who had never dreamed of doing such a thing at home, called upon to read aloud one of Miss Wilkins's short stories, in a country-house party, last summer; and the mess she made of it was astonishing. People sat around shading their eyes with their hands, solemn as owls! And you know our Lady Greenwich has written home to her friends, for heaven's sake to send her out a lot of outrageously slangy Americanisms to learn by heart, or she'll never be a 'go.'"

"I can believe it," said Mrs. Grantham, "after just reading an English story by —, with incidental Americans of unique vulgarity to represent our best society."

"Never mind," said Mr. Cleve, comfortably. "The author is young, and will live to know better. Besides, I forgive anybody who entertains me decently in these days. And, with all their talk in the air, they're awfully nice to us, individually, over there. But speaking of people being put under contribution to entertain each other in English homes, I have at last found my *métier*. I tried it modestly last year, and was quite a blazing success as a teller of American anecdotes racy of the soil. Since then I've subscribed to one of those newspaper-clipping chaps, and he sends me a hundred



assorted jokes for five dollars. I pick out the best, and study them while I'm shaving. Last night a Western fellow who dined with me at the club gave me three brand-new ones. Like to hear them?

"Number 1. Eastern man at a Western hotel (attended at table by a 'waitress' too superior to waste words upon a mere hungry customer).

"*Man*: 'I'll take some berry-pie, please.'

"*Waitress* (coldly and rapidly): 'Straw, ras', huckle, or goose?'

"Number 2. Traveler from frontier district, striking hotel where advanced fashions have obtained, observes, with an expression of pleased surprise, the finger-bowl set before him at the close of his meal.

"'What's this for, waiter?'

"'To wash your hands, sir.'

"'I wish I'd a-know'd it 'fore I began my dinner.'

"And Number 3. You will imagine yourself in a railroad hostelry of the lightning-change variety, where a deliberate diner has just taken his seat at table, and is approached by the breathless waiter.

"'Will you have bean-soup?'

"'Well, let me see. I think I'll—'

"'Dinner's over!'"

It was impossible to resist Mr. Cleve's chuckling enjoyment of his own fun. The wrinkles around his eyes became puckered so comically, his laugh rolled out so like mellow wine from an ancient bottle, his hearers could but join in the chorus. Having made his little coup, the amiable gentleman waggled off to another coterie, where he was heard repeating the same jokes.



"I will say for the old beau that he has a different set every time, and that they are sometimes new," remarked Mrs. Grantham's companion. "Also, that his dinners of eight or ten are feasts to be remembered for substantial excellence. We were talking about—?"

"Sybil Gwynne—and the fact that she is a foreign-bred American. Is she happy here?" asked Mrs. Grantham, who had a way of her own of coming to the point.

"Happy! Who would n't be who is so tremendously petted and extolled as she happens to be just now? Etta Stanley has put the finishing touch upon her vogue. And although Sybil's mother left her but a small income, her aunt is rich and lavish, and the girl is like a princess in a fairy-tale, so far as knowing about real life."

"She has no love-affair on?"

"I think not. A lot of young fellows run after her; but they do it mechanically, like little figures in a street puppet-box, that jump the same way at the same moment. Her life is spent in the most conventional round one can imagine. But she is not dull or vapid. On the contrary, I think Sybil has excellent ability, some sense of humor, and a sweet temper. All I have to complain of is that she is unreal, out of place in her present setting—like a charming actress who has come to fill a brief engagement upon our boards before returning to the place where she was trained. Dear me! Six o'clock? I must fly. So nice to have seen you again. Next year, when you've a daughter to bring out, you'll be obliged to be in the treadmill like the rest of us. Last night I sat on a



dais watching my two girls spin until 2:30 A.M. To-night we have a large dinner at home, the opera, and the Tuesday dance. And I have already been to-day to the dentist with Hal to have his bad tooth out, and after that to hear a string quartet concert, before coming here. You *do* look fresh, Katrina! But only wait. This time next year peep in the glass, and see if you find the same face smiling back at you! Good-by, good-by."

When Mrs. Grantham went down the broad steps to let Mrs. Stanley's curbstome footman put her into her modest cab, she found the way blocked by a well-appointed little brougham, into which a young man was about to assist the beauty, Miss Sybil Gwynne.

"I am sorry to be in your way," smiled the young lady. "Won't you let Mr. Ainslie—this is Mr. Ainslie, Mrs. Grantham—put you in yours first?"

"I hope Katty will always do and say things to older people as prettily as that," thought Katty's mama, while the youthful Corydon in a long frock-coat doffed his high, shining hat, and stepped back to do his lady's bidding.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you for creating a diversion," said he, in answer to the older lady's thanks; "Miss Gwynne has been lecturing me so that I don't know which end I stand upon."

"For shame!" cried Sybil. "You have got the true American habit of exaggeration. I merely told him, Mrs. Grantham, that New York young men ought to take the matter into their own hands, and try to make themselves enjoy life more."

"I like your calling me a New York young man,"



put in Ainslie, "considering I was born in Paris, educated in England, and have spent most of my summers knocking around the Continent."

"Well, a good American young man, if you like that better."

"It is so hard," said Ainslie, whimsically, "to be a good American when one knows only New York, Boston, Washington, a little bit of Baltimore, and all of Newport. When I try to take in the monotony of the rest of our country, my interest becomes homeopathically diluted."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Katrina Grantham, really shocked, and moving toward her carriage, into which she got, only to be detained by their further remarks.

"Now don't you think he deserves my 'lectures,' Mrs. Grantham?" said Sybil Gwynne, lightly.

"I am not a good judge; I live with people who believe in so many things," replied Mrs. Grantham, hurriedly.

"It's more my misfortune than my fault, Mrs. Grantham," went on Ainslie, a fresh-colored young man of very open and engaging countenance. "To prove it, I have deliberately and in cold blood come back here to live. I hope the gods who sit up above and reward us mortals with more or less discrimination will confer on me a large share of—what do they confer—ambrosia?—no; I have an aunt who gives me ambrosia-cake for tea, and it's uncommonly nasty—asphodel—well, anything you like—for my self-sacrifice in becoming a poor republican."

"Tell him to drive on, please," said Katrina to Mrs.



Stanley's footman. "Good-by," she nodded to the pair standing upon the sidewalk.

As she drove away Sybil turned to the young man reproachfully.

"There, now ; you have made another sensible person think of you as a rather civil outlaw."

"The difference between us is that you think these things about our native land, and I say them. I suppose I may n't share the privilege of your Aunt Lewiston's cozy little brougham and drive home with you?"

"Certainly not," said Sybil.

"Not if I am dropped at the corner nearest my club?"

"No," she replied inexorably.

"Very well, then. In London you would n't have minded letting me come with you. I can't afford a hansom in New York ; so I'll just hie me to a street-car, and pack in with thirty or forty dingy people going home from work. I shall be jostled and punched out of all semblance of decency, and my only overcoat will be strained in the seams till—have you no pity on my only overcoat? Are you aware what it costs to buy a new one of a tailor here?"

"Very sorry ; but—home, please," said Sybil, letting herself be shut inside the little carriage, from which her fair loveliness shone out like a star.

The latter part of her remark, being addressed to the footman, was at once transmitted to the power upon the box, and the brougham moved away. Ainslie, lifting his hat and smiling pleasantly, stood there until she had disappeared from view.

"What a nice boy!" Sybil thought to herself, as



she settled back into the soft cushions; "though at twenty-eight he should hardly be called a boy. He amuses me more than any one, and we understand each other perfectly; but I wish he would sometimes seem to be in earnest about something."

Sybil Gwynne was engaged in trying faithfully to adapt herself to a complete change of thought and habit in daily life. The Old-World tinge in her was, by dint of constant application to the claims of her present busy, sparkling life, gradually fading out. The people with whom her lot was cast certainly understood the art of living in its high material sense, and, from dawn to dawn again, with discreet intervals for sleep, her days were passed in pursuit of pleasant things.

Yet there was something lacking—just what, she was not prepared to say. The second season of this brilliant existence had begun to drag with her. Wherever she turned, there was the same perspective of solvent, restless folk intent upon accumulating and displaying the decorations of life, which, it must be said, their opportunities for culture and observation enabled them to appreciate perfectly. And, beyond these, Sybil saw nothing of her fellow-Americans. Her sole idea of her countrymen and -women was a class privileged to make ducks and drakes of any obstacles in the way of their desires—a class spending a few months of the winter in palaces in town, then, at the first hint of spring, wafting themselves away to some far southland in yachts or steamers, or else pounding the railway lines of the continent with the wheels of their private cars in search of softer airs



and change; in the early summer running over to London or Paris for the season and for shopping; at midsummer returning to châteaux at Newport, Bar Harbor, Lenox, or on the Hudson, there to live the lives of the princes of the earth. Did any one of them fancy founding an estate, might not he purchase vast acres of primeval woodland, and in a few months' time adorn it with roads, plantations, bridges, drains, out-buildings, stables, hothouses, lawns, gardens, walls covered with vines, and a house built and fitted up by relays of mechanics, working at night by electric light to fulfil the contract by a date fixed? There was no end to it. As fast as one favored being had accomplished some wonder of Aladdin's lamp, and before his friends had ceased admiring it, a successor would arise to send his rocket even higher into the zenith! And the effect of this upon their community was not inspiring. In the intervals of phenomenal surprises no one could settle down to coherent thought and purpose. Unless the head-lines in society events were as astonishing as those in the daily newspapers, people felt a little bit aggrieved. The fad of haste and unrest was a result. In the perpetual chase after novelty Sybil felt herself, like the rest, becoming breathless without a cause; becoming trivial, disconnected, artificial, and, at times like the present, wondering what it is all worth.

Sybil was, in fact, in the state of mind in which some women join sewing-classes and go to Lenten services, or violently visit the unoffending poor. As she drove down the long avenue to Washington Square, she found herself dwelling with satisfaction



upon the fine lines and earnest, dependable expression of Katrina Grantham's face. Here, at last, was an acquaintance who offered her some variation upon the society by which she was surrounded. The invitation to Katrina's dinner, although extorted by Mrs. Stanley, had been graciously given.

"Do you really think I had better?" Sybil had found time afterward to convey in a whisper to her hostess, with a glance in the direction of unconscious Katrina.

"Of course," Mrs. Stanley had said bluntly. "Do you suppose she does n't know you will be a 'card'?"

"Card" or not, Sybil continued to dwell upon the thought of the 15th with animation. To get out of her groove, to mix a little with brain-workers and possessors of the mental power that makes the wheels of great New York go round, was a decided event. And more than once she recurred to what Mrs. Grantham had said about the "new young man." The terms of the lady's phraseology were so different from those applied to the heroes of her horizon in general.

"I am going to meet a 'best latter-day American,'" she said, smiling at herself in the mirror, while the maid dressed her hair. "I have n't an idea what is an '1840 portrait of a gentleman.' But I recognize Sir Charles Grandison, and I like a man who thinks all women ought to be goddesses. 'Big, trustful, head-strong, ardent.' Oh, dear! what a very out-of-the-way individual he must be!"

Sybil's ordinary evening frock in company was of plain white satin; for, as Mrs. Arden said, "These dinner-girls leave nothing for the brides!" It became her admirably; and as she followed Mrs. Stanley,



twenty minutes after time, into Mrs. Grantham's drawing-room, that deep-red-vestured apartment, hung with the satin damask that had been Katrina's mother's, seemed to have received into it a lily tall and fair upon a virgin stalk. They went in to dinner almost immediately, Mr. Justice Grantham, as a matter of course, leading off with Mrs. Stanley, who, having what she called *la grippe* (in reality only a good old-fashioned cold in the head), looked swelled and stupefied. The splendor of her tiara, the luster of her pearls, could not eclipse or cause to be forgotten a very decided redness about the great lady's nose; and during the soup she could hardly speak for physical reasons, combined with deep anxiety lest they should not serve champagne directly with the fish.

"In this kind of a house they will be likely to keep it back till the saddle of mutton," she thought mournfully; but after her first mouthful of timbale, when the life-giving golden fluid flowed bubbling into her glass, Mrs. Stanley sipped and was consoled. Mrs. Grantham, observing these things from afar, had now but one surviving concern—lest her dignified and sarcastic husband, whom she had heard repeatedly inveigh against fine ladies of the stripe of her old friend Etta—who, ever since her announcement of the present banquet, had peppered her with small shot of ridicule for attempting a Stanley affair—who at the time of going to his room to dress had been gloomily foreboding utter failure for the whole entertainment—should allow this frame of mind to appear in his conversation with their chief guest!

What was her relief, upon peeping between a relic



of the ancestral Granthams—a silver christening-bowl filled with red roses—and the candelabra on four sides of it blooming with crimson shades, to behold the head of her household engaged in the most brilliant banter at his command with the lady at his right! Mr. Grantham was not only what wives call “laying himself out to do the proper thing”: he was apparently engaged in “being fascinating on his own account.” And Etta was warming into such suavity as Mrs. Grantham had not seen her show since Etta was a girl!

“I wish, for their own sakes, men could be a little more consistent,” flashed through the hostess’s mind; “but just now this is a heaven-send, and I’ll never in the world cast it up at Mowbray. And the sweet-breads are just right, thank goodness! Etta seems to have forgotten all about her desire to cultivate Davenant, but that leaves him free to make friends with Sybil Gwynne. I did not think it worth while to tell those two women that I have made up my mind to a match between Davenant and Agatha Carnifex. It was part of my deep-laid plot to put the two opposite each other, instead of side by side, at their first meeting. I must not seem to throw them at each other’s heads. Agatha, I am sure, was sent from heaven to complete the destiny of a fine, ambitious man like Davenant. Nothing would induce me to let my husband know how much this fancy has taken hold of me.”

Miss Carnifex, seated between the grave and distinguished inventor of a flying-machine that needed only capital to launch it triumphantly into space, and a



young African explorer just returned from the heart of the Black Continent, appeared entirely at ease, and unconscious of the schemes projected for her by the lady of the house. She was a stately girl of six-and-twenty, to whom the control, for some years past, of her father's widowed establishment had lent an air of command and self-dependence, the possessor of some beauty, more intelligence, an active habit of mind and body, and many theories. The consciousness that her organization was of a finer quality than that of most people she met gave Agatha perhaps a little complacency in considering herself, but it did not interfere with her ready generosity toward the needs and shortcomings of others. She was always occupied with some scheme that, whether satisfactorily to herself or not, she carried to its end. She had made many mistakes, suffered a few acute disappointments, and still went on journeying up the arc of her rainbow, expecting some day to find the pot of gold—happiness—at the other end of it. One additional peculiarity of Miss Carnifex should be noted. She was a devoted American, a student of history, a Colonial Dame, a conservator of family traditions; and although she had traveled, seen, and experienced as much as most young women of her surroundings, invariably returned with enthusiasm to her own sphere of duty and pleasure.

One can appreciate, therefore, Mrs. Grantham's conviction that an opportunity had come to her to make two deserving people happy and complete their usefulness to their kind. But, as the dinner that was to lead up to this desirable state of things progressed, she



became painfully aware that, while the attention of Miss Carnifex more than once wavered away from her scientist and explorer to pass in swift review the personal claims of her supposed *alter ego*, Mr. Peter Davenant kept his eyes and ears for Miss Sybil Gwynne alone. Having done what civility demanded for the lady at his other side, he had talked, with every evidence of keen delight in this preoccupation, to the beautiful creature, who, as Katrina said to her vexed inner self, was no more suited to his workaday needs than a Dresden figurine is appropriate to a bronze pedestal in the park.



## II



**D**URING the years that Peter Davenant had been at the grindstone in New York he had found it convenient to dispense almost altogether with romantic sentiment. What little he retained centered in the memory of his mother, now passed out of life, and of his Southern home going to decay amid many acres of plantation land, rich in picturesque greenery and semi-tropic blooms—but not in crops.

Sometimes he would step to the window of his office in a “sky-scraping” edifice down-town, looking up at the space of sunny blue sky above the cañon formed by high walls on either side, to be poignantly assailed by his earliest recollections. He seemed to see again the coral branches of the redbud, the waving of garlands of gray moss and yellow jasmine, the gleam of humming-birds and black butterflies with silver-spotted wings, that, when in boyhood he lay upon the ground to look upward, used to be printed upon such a background of vivid azure.

Then, with a sigh, he would turn back to desk and chair and dull routine. His pleasure was dealing with affairs in the court-room; his penance, office work.



But he was interested in all of it, and out of the interviews with keen-faced men of business wearing rusty tweed suits, who defined their clever ideas in idiomatic Americanese, often got inspiration of an active sort. With all the energy of a nature that must have outlet for its strength, he believed in his life, efforts, ambitions, influences. What had at first offended his finer sense in some of his co-workers was accepted as a means toward an end. Out of this training-school for robust citizenship he had come harder externally, but within full of enthusiasm for humanity, and tender as a woman toward what touched his heart.

Now, at thirty, having in hand some of the prizes for which he had striven doughtily, and being on the way to a wider sphere of independent action, he knew moments when the song of the siren sounded in his ear, calling on him to rest and listen and let his eyes glisten with pleasure and love and jubilee. Until recently he had sought no place among the people to whom by training and antecedents he belonged. The only women he knew had been encountered in boarding-houses, and were of the class that flood the shopping-streets of a fine afternoon, that perfume themselves with cheap scents, struggle over bargain-counters, and indoors read "society columns," dreaming of an El Dorado wherein their husbands or fathers may, by some lucky fluke, lift them up to be a part of this coveted social whirl. Commonplace men—vulgar men, even—Davenant was resigned to live and work among. They had almost always the redeeming quality of an unaffected desire to follow their destined walk in life, and were often of the stuff that has gone



into the real greatness of the western continent. But a vulgar woman he could not endure or approach, and a commonplace woman wearied him thoroughly.

When, therefore, this big, masterful, and self-sufficient young man found himself suddenly brought into contact with one of the exotic specimens of a highly cultured race, a creature as far apart from him in habit of life and mode of thought as the poles are separate, the result was like a rifle-shot going through his breast. Before the ices were handed at Mrs. Grantham's dinner, he was asking himself, in a sort of sweet distraction, what was the nature of this pang she had made him feel. How had he lived through so many long, arid years without feeling it before? What would his future life be worth if he could n't feel it repeatedly, enduringly?

Every bit of her, from the crown of her small, well-set head to the tips of her rose-tinted fingers, satisfied his fastidious tastes. The soft voice that caressed his ear in her pleasant discourse was in such delicious contrast with those nasal tones most familiar to him in her sex. Even the measured conventionalism of her manner pleased him. It was thus he would have the woman he honored bear herself in the presence of a stranger. The bounce, the swagger, the challenge or open coquetry of commoner clay had at no time stirred his pulse like Sybil Gwynne's cool unconsciousness of their personal relation. Sybil also represented to him a world from which the nature of his occupations and ambitions had well-nigh shut him out—the world of travel, leisure, acquaintance with things artistic and picturesque; as, for instance, when she told



him of her sensations, the year before, in coming upon the sarcophagus of the great Alexander in the Tchi-mili-Kiosk at Constantinople.

"I had read of it—heard of it," said she; "but what is that to seeing an object so noble, so elevating? When I stood face to face with that more than two-thousand-years-old casket of Pentelic marble, carved with the deep heroic frieze and decked with those lovely rose-and-lilac-tinted garlands, I felt actually lifted up; I *knew* I was looking at one of the Old World's rarest masterpieces of art. One has something of that feeling standing before the 'Venus of Melos' or the 'Winged Victory.' But not even the Parthenon at sunset gave me just the impression I had from Alexander's tomb."

Poor Davenant, who knew much more than she did about the conquering hero's life and deeds, and yet had never got so far away from his own country as the docks at Liverpool, felt arise in him, not envy of this slender, favored girl, but an impulse to embody her with the classic images she evoked—those choice treasures he had always longed to see and bow down before. He murmured something about looking up the back number of a magazine that had had an article on the "find" of the so-called Alexander's sarcophagus, in Sidon, in 1885. He even coldly discussed the part taken in this discovery by the American missionaries then in Syria. And all the while he was singing in his heart: "It is she who is fit to be among the rarest, the finest works of the old Pentelic sculptors. Could I carve, she should stand for my ideal, and, when finished, I would put my work on the top-



most pinnacle of Parnassus or Athens, and then kneel down and worship it."

Mrs. Stanley, feeling better of her cold, and having to acknowledge herself well entertained by her host, now turned to Mr. Davenant. Although it was near the time for the ladies to leave the table, she had exchanged with him but a few banalities.

"I wonder if you have anything on for Monday evening?" she said languidly, looking at him with half-shut eyes.

Davenant tried to think. There was the Patrick Q. O'Shaughnessy Association dinner, at which some of his henchmen were urging him to drop in and make them a much-needed speech.

"Because, if you have n't," went on the lady, with an air of never having heard of a refusal of one of her invitations, "perhaps you will dine with us,—I mean Sybil Gwynne and me,—and go to the opera afterward. There will be only Mr. Ainslie besides; my husband, as you know, sailed to-day in the yacht for the West Indies."

He knew as little of her husband as Mrs. Stanley had known about the unjust judge whose career Peter had helped to cut short; but he bowed to the information, rejoiced, in spite of himself, at her bidding to meet Sybil Gwynne.

"Does—er—Miss Gwynne live with you?" he asked, thrillingly conscious of a flow of white satin that billowed close on the other side of him.

"Sybil—dear me, no! She lives with a very tiresome old cat, her aunt, Mrs. Lewiston, who is an embodiment of colonial New York. Her dining-room is



filled with General Washington pictures, and all that sort of thing. I believe she has got Benjamin Franklin woven in silk, under glass, upon her wall. Agatha Carnifex would have been just the niece for her—instead of Sybil, who is dimly conscious of General Washington's habit of veracity, and that he was the father of an overgrown country we all get away from whenever we can do it. Mrs. Lewiston hates me, because Sybil comes with me, and because I hate Mrs. Lewiston. So there you are! But Sybil is a dear."

Whenever language failed Mrs. Stanley in which to sum up any one rejoicing in the beams of her approval, she epitomized him or her as a "dear." George Meredith and Tolstoi were "dears"; the charming young wife of the then President was a "dear"; so were the Pope, Mr. Gladstone, her bishop, Jean de Reszké, and the French artist who had just finished her portrait.

"You do me too much honor," said Davenant. "I shall be most happy to come to you on Monday."

"At seven-thirty, then, please; and I shall try my best to be down-stairs in time. Do you know, I'm wondering why nobody ever told me what a nice husband Katrina Grantham has got. He has actually made me laugh. So much better than old Cleve, with his cut-and-dried little stories. Now, mind you don't forget Monday. You are sure you've not promised anybody else?"

Davenant thought, with a shudder, of the Patrick Q. O'Shaughnessys, with their green rosettes, howling and thumping on the table, smoking and speechmaking, to the music of a brass band in the gallery.



"Nobody that I dare not forsake for you," he said with prompt gallantry.

"Pretty well for an unsophisticated beginner," thought Mrs. Stanley, "when I remember Reggy Banks telling me he 'd come to me at the opera if his valet did n't forget to put him in mind of it, and Lewis Ford, who asked why Jack put out his second-best whisky for the smoking-room. This man looks like a medieval Florentine—would do for Paolo in a Francesca da Rimini tableau; seems smitten with Sybil, rather. Perhaps he is piqued because I did n't take notice of him a little earlier."

It was Etta's delusion that she was a great lady out of a French novel, who must, for consistency's sake, be provided with a hopeless adorer, if not a *grande passion*. As a matter of fact, not even the women's luncheon parties or sewing-classes had been able to detect in her the most trivial lapse in propriety; and Jack might come and Jack might go without fear of experiencing an emotion of jealousy toward his spouse. The youngsters in attendance on her were on free-and-easy terms of comradeship, which, valuing their substantial privileges in her establishment, they gave no token of a wish to exchange for deeper sentiment. But Etta could not refrain from thinking of herself as a fascinator, and her fancy was to make plans for tête-à-têtes, as often as not forgotten when the time came. As the ladies now arose to leave the table, she did not neglect to engage Mr. Justice Grantham to come to call on her, at four-fifteen, the following Sunday afternoon, which, much to his own surprise, that gentleman found himself promising to do. He



was glad, though, that Katrina was at the far forward end of the line of fair ones the men were conducting into exile. And when he thought of what his darling mischief, Katty, would say if she knew of this divagation on her revered father's part, a little flush came into his face.

"Until Sunday, then," Etta said to him, in a confidential undertone, as they parted.

"What! You are not going to run away now, before we get in there?" asked Grantham, rather stupidly.

"No; but one never knows what opportunity—at four-fifteen, remember," she answered with her best air of mystery,—only to ignore the engagement long before Sunday came—though, as Grantham went that day for a walk with Katty instead, no great harm was done, and when Mrs. Stanley next met him in the lobby at the opera-house, she had to ask Sybil who was that rather good-looking man who bowed to them.

"My dear Katrina, your house is charming, your husband is charming, and my cold is lots better for coming out," she said, settling down in a sovereign manner amid the cushions of Katrina's Morris chair in the drawing-room. "Pray talk to me a little now, and let those two girls take care of each other."

Agatha Carnifex and Sybil, who had gravitated together naturally, were sitting apart on a small Chipendale sofa built for two. This left unattached the fifth lady of their party, Mrs. Willoughby, who, not having had a chance at the planet of fashion during dinner, was disposed to make up for it now.

Mrs. Willoughby, too, was a leader, but her king-



dom and Mrs. Stanley's were not the same, and Mrs. Willoughby was quite willing to leave her throne and take a footstool in Mrs. Stanley's domain. To say why this should have been I leave to some one sufficiently astute to solve the social riddle of New York. Mrs. Willoughby was every whit as well entitled to supremacy as Mrs. Stanley. Mrs. Grantham, who owed the lesser light a dinner, had hesitated a little about making use of this occasion to liquidate the debt; but since Mrs. Arden, who had been first invited, had fallen out, as well as three other desirable "unattached" females bidden to fill the vacancy, and Mr. Chetwood, the famous bachelor lawyer who carried sweetness and light to every dinner-table on his list, had been called away to Washington, what was a poor hostess to do? Mrs. Grantham filled up with Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby.

Mrs. Willoughby, eminent in charities, a great patroness of musical and dramatic recitals, and of deserving beginners in general, was just at present in the throes of having moved into a grand new house. This complaint, so common among New-Yorkers, had attacked her in a virulent form. Most of her days, of late, had been spent in conducting parties of friends from room to room, from floor to floor, of her recent acquisition. On more than one such occasion, it may be remarked, Mr. Willoughby, in his shirt-sleeves, playing an obbligo upon his back hair with two silver brushes, had been exhibited (without intention) in his dressing-room. And Mrs. Willoughby had received so many praises for her taste, ingenuity, practical skill,—most of which were due to the archi-



tect-decorator,—that even she had grown weary of the chorus. She knew intuitively what people were going to say about things when they stood upon certain rugs or sections of parquetry floor. She was tired of her own stock remarks about curtains and cabinets and corner cupboards. But she could not yet bring herself to give up her glory and step into the background along with the other women who had lived their little day as the owners of the last new houses.

Accordingly, when Mrs. Grantham graciously invited her to be seated beside Mrs. Stanley, who looked at her in a coldly distant way, the lady at once broke forth :

“Such a pleasure to come into a finished house! You know we have been waiting all the winter for the stone mantelpiece that was carved in Paris for our library. Now they discover it will not fit, and the workmen must all come back just when our tapestries are hung. I’ll declare I am ready to leave everything and go abroad!”

“Your Mr. Davenant *is* good-looking,” said Mrs. Stanley, addressing herself to Katrina. “I like his clear, dark skin and hazel eyes; and the profile is wonderfully strong. Pray is not that a portrait of your mother as I remember her? Speaking of portraits, have you seen Chatain’s of me? Every one says it is his masterpiece. It is just now at Doutil’s gallery, and, I am told, is drawing crowds. You can have no idea of our trouble to pitch upon a proper gown for my sittings. Half a dozen of mine were rejected, and at last the artist himself drove with



me to Worth's atelier to select that peach-blossom velvet."

"I have seen it," said Mrs. Willoughby, with cordiality. "The flesh-tints are a marvel. Mine, by Carolus, does not compare with it. But I find the next thing to getting a good portrait is deciding on the place to hang it in. We made sure that the boudoir was exactly right for mine; but somehow the old-rose hangings the upholsterer put up killed the colors in my background; and now, after going into every room on that floor, my picture is actually standing in a corner with its face to the wall. Mr. Willoughby says we shall have to build an annex to contain it."

"Is n't your daughter going to show?" went on Mrs. Stanley to Katrina. "If she would like my box for the Saturday matinée at the opera, I will send you the tickets to-morrow."

Mrs. Grantham, having it on her lips to explain that Katty had gone out to a school-girl dinner, but would be very glad to avail herself of Mrs. Stanley's politeness, was cut short by the undaunted Mrs. Willoughby.

"What a good location your box is in!" she said to Mrs. Stanley. "I tell my husband he did not strike his usual lucky vein when he got ours. Katty is certainly a pretty and fascinating creature, and, with certain people to back her, will be sure to make a success. Indeed, I tell her that if she is a *very* good girl from now till then, I may give her a coming-out cotillion in my ball-room, for which they are still weaving the draperies in France, so it will probably not be finished before next autumn. We must not forget Katty



next season, Mrs. Stanley. Between us she will do well."

Mrs. Stanley's cold eyes emitted a danger-signal. She attempted to speak, but failed, and, hunching one shoulder, turned it deliberately upon Mrs. Willoughby's presumption. Mrs. Grantham, in despair, wished it had not gone out of fashion to ask people to sing and play after dinner, since Mrs. Willoughby, whatever she lacked, was a brilliant pianist of the modern school. Katrina, although she disliked the custom heartily, even wished that she had hired an artist to sing, recite, juggle, or whistle—in this interim.

"They are not having a happy time over there," said Agatha Carnifex, whom few things escaped; "shall we enlarge their circle?"

So saying, she arose and, followed by Sybil, crossed the drawing-room. The entrance of a servant with Apollinaris water and a decanter of *crème de menthe* effected the rest. The group, broken and recast, left Etta protected on each side by a young lady, and Mrs. Grantham at the mercy of her effusive guest.

Agatha, when brought into contact with Etta Stanley, always felt herself misplaced and at a disadvantage. An optimist in theory, ever ready to dwell upon the hopeful conditions of the society of her birthplace, she disliked being reminded of the firm foundation of such rocks in the current of progress as Etta and her set. Among them she found neither enthusiasm, sense of proportion, nor capacity to distinguish between excellence and mediocrity. The incoherence, the confusion, of their lives troubled her. But, tiring



of the attitude of a critic, she had at last resolved to take the broad view that in all great centers of social life good taste and folly are equally distributed, to accept her surroundings, stand by her home and birth-right with dignity, and grasp at the best that came to her.

In moments of wider vision she looked with pride upon a metropolis to which all the nations of the earth have furnished citizens—a city that in scope, prospects, tremendous potentiality, picturesqueness of gathered races, extremes of wealth and poverty, must fix the interest of every real thinker upon the world's progress.

But, from these empyrean thoughts, what a downfall to Mrs. Stanley, a pretentious figurehead to whom numbers of the clever people of Agatha's acquaintance paid court, whom the younger generation of good society aspired to know and emulate! She liked Sybil, whose gentle grace appealed to her—who, if not exactly brilliant, was intelligent and impressionable. To be better friends with her it had often entered into Agatha's mind would be a desirable attainment; but the thought had been as often dismissed in the whirl that keeps us forever lamenting the divergence from ours of delightful lives into which we have had glimpses wholly satisfying, only to lose them in the turning of the wheel.

And Etta! How could Sybil stand being the shadow of this adumbration of womankind? Agatha's patience was also taxed by the way in which her own beloved and respected father put up with Etta's airs and whims; by his declaration that, as she was the child of his old friends, and her house one of the best



ordered in town, he liked to drop in upon her once in a while; worse, by his phlegmatic confession that he found Etta not at all a bad sort to talk to!

Then there was Mowbray Grantham, one of the most sensible men of Agatha's acquaintance, devoting himself to Mrs. Stanley all during dinner, to the exclusion of Mrs. Willoughby, who sat on his other side. For Etta he had put forth his wit, his satire, his knowledge of men and things. And Etta had nodded acquiescence till her tiara sent forth twinkles of coruscating light; had smiled in her wooden fashion; had contributed no fresh thought or keen response to the conversation; and yet her neighbor had appeared to be as well pleased as if she had been a mine of discernment. All this perplexed Agatha. It made her wonder if the man exists who cannot be flattered by the attention of a woman of fashionable vogue.

When the gentlemen came out, Mrs. Grantham, who had been lying in wait for this opportunity, contrived that Davenant should be placed in a corner beside Miss Carnifex. Then the African explorer, a fair and blond-bearded young man, consented, at the solicitation of Mrs. Willoughby, to give the company some examples of native music among a tribe of black men he had discovered on his last journey. While every one wondered if he were about to produce his instrument from his waistcoat pocket,—some wagering it would prove to be a jew's-harp, others a comb,—the butler, who had been sent on an errand to the nether regions, reappeared, bearing upon a silver tray two sticks of kindling-wood. Accepting these with a polite countenance, the explorer proceeded to stand upon the



hearth-rug, and striking them together in rhythmic cadence, accompanied the exercise by a weird, droning chant that in the course of time "got upon the nerves" of everybody present. Afterward the traveler, with the modesty of a school-boy, told two or three thrilling incidents of adventure among his aborigines; and then Mrs. Stanley got up to go.

"So interesting, was n't it?" said Mrs. Willoughby, intercepting her. "Do you know, I think I will inaugurate my new music-room by an African 'talk' from Dr. Charles, with stereopticon views and that awfully nice music upon kindling-wood. I wonder if he would do it?—such people always like to talk. If I can secure him I will surely let you know—oh! this is my husband, Mrs. Stanley, who has not had an opportunity to be presented to you before—"

"Pleased to meet you, madam," said Mr. Willoughby, a large, bland, pink-faced man, offensively well satisfied with himself and his wife. "I am afraid you ladies owe me a grudge for having detained our host so long in the dining-room. The fact is, I was telling him our extraordinary experience in having to take up two floors and replace a whole set of beams in our new house, because—"

Mrs. Stanley had moved away. As Sybil in her wake passed to the door of the drawing-room, Agatha noticed that she turned and bestowed a nod and smile upon Peter Davenant, which had the immediate effect of making Agatha's companion babble in his speech, lose his thread of talk, and flush up to the roots of his hair.

"A perfect creature," said Agatha, readily and generously.



"Is she not?" he exclaimed, then restrained himself.

The Granthams, to whom it never made any difference in particular when they went to bed, having seen Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby also depart, now urged upon their other guests to remain and chat. For this purpose they adjourned to Mowbray Grantham's study, serving also as a smoking-room, and until a late hour sat about in his old worn leather arm-chairs, and chatted of a wide variety of topics. Katty, coming flushed and rosy in her little pink-satin cloak from her girls' party, made the rounds, spoke to every one, and was sent off to her slumbers. Once or twice Agatha, noticing the clock, and solicitous for their coachman, tried to induce her father to take leave. But the old boy, who was thoroughly enjoying himself, would not budge. It was an arena for men's discussion principally, Katrina and her friend keeping together, and listening, well pleased. Among the debates upon many themes of interest, Peter Davenant, shaking off the spell of a recent influence, gave rein to himself, fairly flashing upon the imagination of his hearers. His vivid phrases, stimulating wit, abounding life and spirits, made the utterances of others seem tame. With all his independence of mental attitude, there was no dogmatism or pugnacity, and a quaint, old-time courtesy underlaid his manner with men as with women.

When at last Agatha's twitch upon Mr. Carnifex's coat-sleeve succeeded in abstracting the old gentleman from Mowbray Grantham's chair, and the father and daughter drove away home, he was fairly purring with satisfaction.



"That was something like an evening," he said into the huge white-feather boa with which Miss Carnifex had wrapped her neck. "Gad! I don't know when I've met a fellow like Davenant. He's a *man*, Agatha; please make a note of it! I got him to promise to come in and eat dinner with you and me on Sunday. Grantham sha'n't keep the treasure to himself. Funny, was n't it, their putting him between two such pieces of fashionable still-life as Etta and her friend Miss What-d'ye-call-'em? He must have felt like an eagle trying to keep along with two little downy chicks."

"Then you did n't notice him much," said Miss Carnifex, "or you'd have seen that he had neither eyes nor ears for anything but one of the downy chicks. He looked at Sybil Gwynne as I've seen little street-boys gaze at Easter images in a confectioner's window."

"Oh, my dear, I hope not—I *hope* not," repeated Mr. Carnifex.

"Why not, father?"

"I have seen that happen before."

"What—little street-boys looking into windows?"

"Little boys getting what is not good for them, and suffering for it afterward."

"What a horrid allegory!" cried Agatha. "And this about one of your own dear Etta's pet associates. But I'll go no further in that direction. I'll be loyal as Sybil deserves. I think she is lovely enough and refined enough to turn any man's head who can appreciate her. But that is a long way from thinking she would fancy Davenant. They say Mrs. Lewiston expects her to marry well abroad. An old English



name and estate, with a lodge and a gate-keeper, and shooting-parties every year, would please Sybil's aunt, and an incidental title, if Providence were kind."

"Then let her catch her foreign hare and cook him," say I. "I have no idea of one of our large-brained, large-futured men tying himself to the flounce of a mere doll of society."

"Now, daddy, I have hopes of you. You are seeing the folly of your ways, and turning aside into the right path."

"It is simply incalculable, the mischief these pretty little pink-and-white persons do when they are turned loose in the world. A glance, a smile, a talk during the courses of a dinner, and the man is made or marred for life. Women are the very deuce of an influence, anyhow. Sometimes it's the mother that warps a fellow's career; oftener, his wife. But, as a wise man once said: 'A man's mother is his misfortune, his wife his fault.'"

"Daddy, you are not very complimentary to our sex."

"You are one in a hundred, child; and your good sense must show you that what I say is true. What's the matter with so many American men nowadays, that makes them tear and strain and fret to get money at any cost, if 't is not the chafing, ambitious, dissatisfied women behind them, urging them on?"

The carriage, pulling up before their door, brought his outburst to a sudden close. Agatha knew that the fire would soon burn itself out, and her father become his gentle, whimsical self again.

But she wondered if what he had said were true.



In any case, she was very glad to think she was to see Davenant again on Sunday.

MEANWHILE Mrs. Grantham, having bid adieu to the last of her guests, was anxiously interrogating her husband as to the success of the evening.

"I think it went off uncommonly well, don't you?" she said, standing beside him, where he had dropped into his own chair, and was unfolding the evening paper he had not before had time to read.

"Yes, very well," he said abstractedly, his eye having caught a leading article on the editorial page. "Hum! Scolding—as usual."

This, as Mrs. Grantham well knew, was not directed toward herself, but to the powers that fling printers' ink against their enemies.

"Do stop reading one minute, Mowbray. Half the fun of a thing is talking over it with somebody afterward. I really want your candid opinion about the dinner and everything."

"That woman of yours did so well with the cooking, there 'll be no excuse for future deficiencies," he said, now retired behind a double barricade of printed columns.

"You stupid Mowbray!—as if we did n't have a Swedish head cook in. How nice you were to Etta, dear! I feel as if I could never thank you enough for making the exertion—"

Here, feeling herself on dangerous ground, she hastened to diverge.

"And but for those tiresome Willoughbys all would have gone well. I am resolved never again to dine



with bores that we must have in return. And, for a wonder, that big lamp with the pink shade did n't smoke; I *was* so relieved. Mowbray, did you ever see Katty look prettier than when she came in to-night from the fresh air? She could hold her own by Sybil Gwynne any day, I think. Well, whatever happens, at last I have brought those two together."

No answer.

"Mowbray! I say at last I have brought those two together."

"What two?" issued in an abstracted voice from behind the newspaper.

"This is perfectly tormenting, the way you make a point of reading all the time I talk to you. Since you are not interested, perhaps I had better go to bed."

"I think so, dear; it's very late. *Good night*," said the voice, with more alacrity.

"See if I tell you anything again!" exclaimed his wife, getting to the door, ready to cry with vexation; then, rushing back like a whirlwind, she threw both arms around his neck and newspaper.

"Good night, you darling! I am sorry I was cross."

"To-morrow you will tell me all your gossip," said Mr. Grantham, affectionately, but with eyes glued upon a paragraph he had been straightening out from the literature crushed upon his knee.



### III



DAVENANT thought he could never pass the heavy hours intervening between the dinner at the Granthams' and his next meeting with Sybil.

Since prosperity had begun to dawn on him, he had exchanged his room at a boarding-house for a tiny suite in a bachelor-apartment house. His sitting-room, overflowing with books and pipes, possessed a couch, book-shelves, some easy-chairs, a broad table with an electric drop-light under a green shade, and an open fireplace. When there was no longer room for a friend to sit down, by reason of the accumulation of papers, periodicals, and volumes, Peter would displace these from the chairs, and range them in toppling piles along the vacant floor-spaces. His inner room, containing a bed, dressing-table, wash-stand, and large tin tub, was otherwise a howling wilderness of boots and shoes. But this home had been to Davenant till now a very sanctuary of pleasantness and peace, away from the bustling multitude with whom his days were spent. Although he read far less of general literature than in former days, it was there, ready to hand. Often he would take down his books, blow dust from the tops, handle them lov-



ingly, turn the leaves, catch a familiar page, con a few lines of it, then put the tantalizing treasures back in place, cheered by their presence, and feeling as if he had shaken an old friend by the hand. Some day—ah, delicious “some day”!—he would take time to re-read his favorites, and to read some of the new books he could not resist buying, although he had little chance to know more of them than their bindings, print, and title-pages.

There were pictures on the walls, chiefly classic photographs the originals of which he fully intended yet to enjoy; and a portrait of his beautiful Southern mother, dressed in white muslin, and wearing her dark hair rolled under in the fashion called *à l'Impératrice Eugénie*. She had been, like Davenant himself, of the coloring Fortuny conferred upon his “Spanish Lady,” now in the Metropolitan Museum, though of more regularly beautiful features and contour—a famous New Orleans belle, married to a Carolinian planter of Huguenot descent, and the fortunes of both had gone under in the crash of the Confederacy. Her life as a widow, her death in pinching poverty before Davenant was able to fulfil the ambition of his life to give her the semblance of a comfortable home, were sorrows that had left indelible traces on his heart. Now he had only himself to care for. He never went back to the rice-fields near the closed mansion, that every year clothed themselves anew in living green; to the groves garlanded with flowers and alive with mocking-birds. He did not even mention them.

The Saturday evening before Davenant was to repair to the opera with Sybil and his new patroness



found him seated beside his table, preparatory to going out to get his dinner at the club. The book open in his hand was a copy of Theocritus, a singer whose strains he had not wooed in ages. As his eye rambled over the lays of shepherds chanting the praises of their fair, a smile came upon his lips.

"The symptoms have not changed in the least since the beginning of the third century before Christ," he said to himself.

There was a knock at the door. The janitor's wife—a very fine person when you met her shopping in Twenty-third street, with her fashionable ruffled cape, large Gainsborough hat, and diamond ear-rings, but here less imposing in the simple dishabille of a calico wrapper, over which she wore a beaded bolero jacket—came in. Her face was heated with conflict; her eyes flashed scorn and incredulity upon an object she carried in both hands. It was, as Davenant at once saw, a cast of the "Winged Victory" he had bought that morning, together with a "Venus of Melos," from a vender in the street, and had ordered to be delivered at his house.

"It 's meself brought it up to show it you, Misther Davenant," cried the angry dame. "An' the other wan—though, sure, she 's got a head on to her, barrin' the arms—I left down below with that saucy Eytalian. An' he pretendin' he did n't understand a word of me, an' me kapin' on tellin' him he 's ch'atin' you, wantin' to l'ave his damaged images an' scoot away. 'Where's the head?' says I. 'Did you break it afther he paid for it?' says I. 'Have you got the pieces in your pocket, an' not the conscience to give 'em up?' says I—"



"It's all right, Mrs. O'Brien. Fetch up the 'Venus' too, and let the fellow go in peace. You see, I bought these ladies cheap by taking them 'as is,'" interposed Davenant, to stem the flowing tide.

When he had put the two figures upon the top of a bookcase, he paused before them in reverence, because She had admitted having done so before the originals. And before he went off to his evening meal, in closing Theocritus his eye rested upon a passage in the "Song of the Cyclops," from which he tore out the kernel, as follows:

But to leave loving thee, maiden, when once I had seen thee,  
had I not the strength . . . even from that hour.

"That fits me, I fear," he laughed, with spring budding in his heart. Little he cared for consequences. His mood was in tune with boyish abandonment to happiness. Some men, espying him far off in a corner of the club dining-room, sitting alone at his table, and coming over to settle down upon him for a talk about a certain political appointment of their party, were astonished at his vague interest in the affair. They looked at his brilliant eye, his flushed cheek, and wondered if he were about to go under with a physical malady. But Davenant, scoffing at the suggestion, declared and showed himself to be in full possession of his usual splendid health.

"Depend on it, he's heard of another piece of good luck coming to him," said one to the other afterward. "That fellow wins on every throw."

Not being in condition to adapt himself to club society, he returned to his writing-table, where an



unfinished brief awaited him. A few paragraphs written, that too was cast aside. He went to the window and looked up into a firmament of deepest distances, radiant with stars and star-dust. Sallying forth once more, he walked away from the street wherein arose his tall, modern domicile, over to a broad avenue, which he followed to its end.

Facing Washington Square, he found easily the number of the dwelling he had sought out at the club, in the printed register of chosen names, into which he had as yet had occasion to make few predatory excursions.

It was one of a row of staid old family mansions that make of their vicinity a real Faubourg St. Knickerbocker. Their broad fronts of red brick, with white-marble steps and facings, their many-paned windows and prim iron railings, the immaculate tone of their muslin window-curtains, contrast pleasantly with the carved stone and wrought-iron, the plate-glass and embroidered laces, of the house-façades up-town.

Having identified the shrine of his idol, and observed that all of its windows were demurely veiled in a thin white stuff drawn close against the inner panes, Davenant strolled over into the square opposite, where, sitting at one end of a bench occupied at the other by a bent man in a slouched felt hat, who was enjoying an evening pipe, he could keep the beloved house in view.

A little farther along the row, a large dwelling, with lights behind every window and an awning run out to the curbstone, showed that an evening party was in progress. By and by, while he was gazing over at



the Lewiston house, Davenant observed that its heavy front door was in the act of swinging open. His heart beat dangerously fast, yet the sensation was not unpleasant. In the light streaming from the hall he beheld a fat man-servant in evening clothes waddle out pompously to give directions to a footman in a high hat and long overcoat who arrived from the nether regions of the house. Then appeared a maid carrying a fan; and lastly emerged a slight, graceful figure clothed from head to foot in a long, white-satin cloak bordered with fluffy fur, the train of whose gown the maid lifted as the wearer began to descend the steps.

The "spirit in his feet" carried Davenant so rapidly across the space of roadway and sidewalks intervening between them, that when he came up with the little party, Sybil Gwynne, attended by the two servants, was but just turning away from her aunt's door. She started in genuine surprise at thus meeting him.

"Mr. Davenant!" she exclaimed. "You—you were coming here?"

Davenant, although no master of the art of ceremony, knew quite well that he had not the conventional right to present himself at Mrs. Lewiston's without an indication from the mistress of the house that his visit was desired.

"No," he said straightforwardly; "I was not coming here."

Sybil laughed like a child. "I don't know whether I like you to be so candid. It leaves me in the attitude of supposing you wished to see me again, when, perhaps, you had even forgot our meeting at Mrs. Grant-ham's."



"I did not dare to offer a visit where I had not been asked," he said; then added with absolute frankness, "I came simply to look at the outside of your house."

What possessed Sybil, that, at this, the blood ran up to her cheeks and ears and temples? She was thankful for the half-light of the street.

"I am bound, as you see, to a party in our neighborhood, so near that I had n't an excuse to drive there," she hastened to say, at the same time moving on in the direction of her destination.

"Might I walk there with you?"

"Oh, of course. Then you are going to Mrs. Crawford's too?"

"Unfortunately not. I never, indeed, had the advantage of hearing Mrs. Crawford's name until you mentioned it."

What *was* she to do with this strange, truth-telling, fervid being, striding beside her as if he wore seven-league boots, and turning upon her a look of such unqualified delight? In all Sybil's experience of men, the like had not happened to her before. The maid and footman, who followed discreetly, saw nothing out of the way in the rencounter of their young lady with a handsome gentleman, in proper evening dress, who had been passing Mrs. Lewiston's door as she came down the steps. But the young lady herself, all a-flutter with inward excitement, knew better.

"There is n't any chance you are going to dine at the Carnifexes' to-morrow?" he asked appealingly, as they separated a little group of street-gazers in order to pass under Mrs. Crawford's awning.

It had been so ridiculously short, their walk to-



gether, and yet both, in the brief time, had felt so much! Sybil was aware of a tremor in her voice when she answered:

"No. But you've not forgotten Monday?"

"Forgotten! Why, I've thought of nothing else. It came to me in court yesterday when I got up to make an argument, and I was on the point of a very bad break. Fortunately, one of the judges was sharpening a lead-pencil, and another was reading a dinner invitation, so I suppose they did not notice; and I rallied soon."

"Absurd! Good night, then."

But she did not really consider it absurd. Although this was their second meeting only, she had been thinking of him almost as much as he confessed to having thought of her.

Davenant had no excuse to linger in the staring little crowd about Mrs. Crawford's door. Sybil, running up the steps as light as a fairy, vanished from his sight. There was absolutely nothing to live for until they should meet again.

It was characteristic of the man that he did not consider the very decided probability that fate would oppose him in his first love-affair. This chance meeting, his being alone with her for these few happy minutes under the stars and gas-lamps, feasting his eyes upon her beautiful face and small, shapely head, her young form in its drapery of glistening white, were all-sufficient for the hour.

It was too much to hope that she cared as he did, or at all, as yet. But Davenant, marching away up-town, vowed that she soon should care. He would win her,



marry her, crown his life with her dear comradeship. Whatever obstacles were between them should melt before the intense purpose he would bring to bear upon accomplishing his heart's desire.

ONE of the few indulgences our hero had given himself in his improved financial state was a riding-horse. A true Southerner in his love of the saddle, the long intermission in his exercise had been a deprivation he was glad now to make good. At rarer intervals than he liked he got off to visit the stable near the park where he kept his steed, and, there mounting, spend several hours in the open.

On the morning after this unexpected talk with Sybil he fared gaily into bright winter sunshine, traversing the park, and pursuing his way along the banks of the Hudson, thence into the interior, for a long ride. It was his hope thus to rid himself of superabundant vitality; but as the hours progressed, his spirits seemed to him inexhaustible. It was as if he had been born again. All of life before him was a flower-garden, without a blight or decay in any plant of its parterres. Never had it occurred to him there was so much joyance in the world. From a looker-on he was suddenly transformed into a participant. Everything appeared possible that he desired. The yearning for travel he had so long kept under sprang up full-fledged and confident. With her, what added joy to view the places of his dreams! She should be his guide, interpreter, his higher and finer intelligence, in all these matters. Means wherewithal, the sordid cares of life, did not enter into these pleasurable specu-



lations of Mr. Peter Davenant. He was strong to do all that man had done. Under her inspiration he would be expanded, completed, ready for everything required.

Far up in the country north of the city limits he came upon a wheelman in temporary stress of circumstance. Davenant, who exchanged a word with him, tarried, struck by the bonhomie of the young fellow's manner, the frank look of his wide-open blue eyes.

"I am overtaken by disaster," he had said with a laugh; "because one can't attempt pleasuring near town on a mild Sunday like this without being crowded out. One lot of loud-mouthed revelers set on me, surrounded me, assimilated me. I freed myself of them only at the last road-house, where they halted for refreshment. I have seen most of the nations on the move to-day, though of course it's far worse in summer. When my cordial friends stopped, I fled—with this result."

"Our brotherhood of citizens is certainly not enticing when it goes abroad on such a Sunday as this," said Davenant.

"The plague of it is, the same people would be interesting on their native heath. And I want to be interested. It is n't because they're free and easy with me that I find them dull. I never saw anywhere a class attitude more independent than that of the all-pervading bourgeois in the environs of Paris on the first day of the week. Democratic social equality is at high-water mark there; but it is not aggressive. It does not stick its elbow in your ribs, tread on your toes without apology, shout and hoot its consciousness



of being as good as you although you may wear better clothes."

Davenant laughed.

"For so many years I've known nothing else than jostling with the mob of commonplace, I suppose I'm hardened. You, I take it, are a 'tenderfoot.'"

"I suppose I am. That is, I have had the bad luck to be pitched head first into this community, to make my living out of it, with the training of an idler in foreign countries."

They talked for a while longer, then, at the bicycler's suggestion, agreed to rendezvous for luncheon at the roadside hostelry of a Frenchman certified to be capable of a capital *omelette aux fines herbes*, and good for a decent bottle of red wine.

"If you go there in summer," added his new comrade, "you will have Baptiste, with his napkin, waving you into an arbor made of withered pine-branches overgrown with morning-glories and scarlet-runners, where he has strewn gravel underfoot, and sets out his tables with red claret-glasses and bunches of cheap flowers. Now we shall have to be content with a small inside room, if we are lucky enough to get it to ourselves."

When Davenant reached M. Baptiste's little frame house, standing back from the road in a grove of trees, his companion had already ordered the luncheon and secured the inside room. A tiny table, spread invitingly, awaited them. And when to the omelet was added a dish of cutlets, broiled, not fried, with potatoes bursting from jackets of light golden brown, together with good bread, a plate of fruit, and the



promised bottle of French grape-juice, Davenant broke forth rejoicingly :

“I have passed this place a dozen times, and never dreamed of the treasure it contains.”

“I have developed him,” said his friend. “Last year I found Baptiste struggling with the popular demand for custard-pie and doughnuts. I talked to him in his native tongue ; adjured him, by the bones and stew-pans of his ancestors, not to forget their cunning because transplanted to a land of far away. He has made quite a reputation by his cabbage *farci aux saucissons*. But I am bound to confess that his American dishes are as bad as you generally find them elsewhere.”

Starting upon this substantial basis for acquaintanceship, the two men fraternized rapidly. They talked of many topics, each finding in the other a certain zest of surprise. Davenant had never met any one exactly like this fair, soft-voiced fellow, with the manner of a fainéant and the build of an athlete, whose talk revealed habits and thoughts totally unknown to the hard-worked lawyer. His attitude toward life was that of one who, not being able to help himself, tries to make the best of his regrettable surroundings. Involuntarily, Davenant thought of a plant he had taken long ago from his mother's conservatory and set out in a garden dug by him in the woods. The plant had done its best to live, but could not flourish.

When the time came for them to share the score and part, they shook hands heartily. When the bicyclist was out of sight ahead of him on the return to



town, Davenant remembered they had not exchanged names.

THAT evening, on presenting himself at the house of Mr. Carnifex, to receive a warm welcome from the host and a quieter one from the young hostess, the three sat for a while about a wood fire in a dimly lighted drawing-room before dinner was announced.

There was little in this room to suggest the femininity of its presiding genius. No triplication of curtains at the windows, no portières, no little tables perilously full of silver or china toys; above all, no cushions, which, however much they add to the luxurious repose of modern life, induce as much disturbance—first, because of their bad habit of slipping away from the angles of the human frame where they are designed to be; and, secondly, because under no circumstances will a housekeeper admit that she has enough of them.

The friends of Mr. and Miss Carnifex were asked to take their ease in chairs or on couches covered in a dark silken stuff that had not been changed in years. A grand piano, a writing-table solidly equipped, and some healthy-looking palms and ferns growing in jars in the windows, gave the chief evidence of a woman's rule there. Upon the Quakerish background of drab-painted walls hung some good pictures. A cabinet, and the mantelpiece crowded with Chinese porcelains of beauty and value, represented the host's fancy in art. The room, in fine, while not in the least "pretty" according to the canons of modern decoration, appeared to represent a leisurely lifetime that had



treated itself to a few good things and let the rest alone. The guest now enjoying its repose knew no consciousness of fleeting moments until Mr. Carnifex, crossing the room, tugged at a faded bell-pull wrought in worsted-work.

"Dinner," he said to the man who answered. "We will wait no longer, dear, for Ainslie," he added to his daughter.

Simultaneously the door into the hall gave admission to Davenant's bicyclist of the morning. Both men looked pleased and surprised.

"Then I need not introduce you?" said Mr. Carnifex.

"Only to give us names," answered the newcomer, after he had made easy apologies to Miss Carnifex for his delay. "I at least have been dying to know his."

The story of their meeting and impromptu luncheon broke the ice of the first moments at table in a large, bare refectory, where conspicuous objects were the coal-hod, an old-fashioned dinner-tray, and a series of Copley and St. Mémin portraits on the walls.

The service of Canton-blue porcelain, with the fiddle-patterned silver spoons and forks, dimly recalled to Davenant an old house in Charleston where, as a lad, he was urged to two helpings of everything,—where the maiden hostess wore "sausage-puffs" under her cap,—and where his youthful imagination was intoxicated by the varieties of sweet pickles strung about the board in leaf-shaped dishes of the same azure tint.

The dinner was good, the wines better, the host delightful. Agatha, who talked little, made herself most



agreeable. When, afterward, Davenant asked a girl why she had called Miss Carnifex "a man's woman," he received this answer :

"Oh, because she makes it a point to let men have their way, beginning with that nice old tyrant, her papa."

The truth was, Agatha possessed so wide a scope in her father's house that she had never felt able to contemplate leaving it for another man's. Peter had not been with them ten minutes before discovering that on all practical matters she ruled her parent with a humorous assumption of greater age and knowledge than his own, although letting him go under loose rein whenever his hobbies were concerned.

At twenty-six she esteemed herself an old maid ; and the repose which the abandonment of concern on the marriage question gave to her manner induced many men to confide in her their affairs with other women. Hamilton Ainslie, for example, a cousin in the third or fourth degree, had told her about his passion for Sybil Gwynne almost as soon as that emotion had gained a recognized place in his manly bosom.

When Ainslie had come back from Europe to live in New York, Agatha had decided upon making him her "mission." She considered him as one more sinned against than sinning, a product of the modern custom of absenteeism among Americans who live abroad and bring up their children in alien fashions. She had an idea she could do him good, rouse his dormant patriotism, make him throw off the sloth resulting from having been a citizen of the world when he ought to have been a citizen of the nursery.



Ainslie liked her lectures, her down-setting way with him, her assumption of extreme old age and matronly dignity with a man who was her senior by two years. He treated her with courtesy and perfect good humor. His only grudge against her was that she could not be brought to concede that Sybil Gwynne was born into the world to make a helpmate for him.

"My dear Hamilton, you would be a pair of babes in the wood," she had said six months before, knitting her forehead and throwing from it a little lock wont to escape and confer upon her handsome, serious face a mutinous expression not displeasing to the eye. "Promise me that you will not commit yourself until you have thought over it a year."

"I may as well promise," he had said. "In the first place, she does not yet see the thing in the light I do. In the next, between us we could n't afford any kind of house or trap, or amusements or travels, such as the girls of her set think indispensable."

"What do men of your set think about them?"

"We don't think," said Ainslie. "The times are too hard upon us. We simply drift."

The talk at Mr. Carnifex's table to-night gave Davenant a fresh sense of the pleasure to be had from rubbing wits and exchanging views with people of his own kind. Mr. Carnifex and his daughter would have meant so much to him had he only been able to claim their acquaintance during the dull evenings of the working-years past! And Ainslie, despite his light touch of and mocking indifference to real things, had stuff in him undoubtedly.

Agatha's only fear, that her father would bring the



conversation around to the folly of a young man of ambition and parts fixing his fancy on a girl of fashionable life, was set at rest. Women entered in no shape into the evening's discussion.

When the visitors took leave, they walked together as far as the street where Davenant turned off.

"Good night," he said. "I have to thank you for a very jolly day. What fun it would be, now, were I to meet you—by Jove! I *am* to meet you, for Mrs. Stanley said you are coming—to-morrow night."

"Of course I am coming," answered Ainslie, lightly. "Do not we all fly at Mrs. Stanley's bidding?"

At this point Davenant was guilty of a weakness. He wished to speak aloud a name that had haunted his brain-cells persistently.

"I believe it's to be a small party like to-night's?—nobody besides our hostess, except Miss Gwynne and you and me."

"Miss Gwynne and you and me," repeated Ainslie, assentingly; and the pair separated.



#### IV



DAVENANT was taking off his overcoat in custody of two or three of Mrs. Stanley's liveried appendages, when the grille that served as a portal to her spacious vestibule opened to admit Ainslie, as usual on the run and a little out of breath.

"Those hanged cable-cars!" he said. "Nice way for a man to come out to dinner, is n't it? I started right enough, standing on my feet, wedged in by a jam; but gradually the crowd increased till I was squeezed upward, and I ended by crawling out over their shoulders. As I left I heard an Irishman, who had been for a long time hanging on to a strap, cry out to the rest of 'em, 'Be jabbers! have n't *any* of yez homes?'"

A very young flunky, who was depositing Mr. Ainslie's stick in a porcelain jar, smiled at this with sympathetic understanding.

"What a contrast between that mob and this kind of thing!" said Ainslie, as, assured that their hostess would be down-stairs in a minute, they were ushered into an empty room of state. "I know her minutes," Ainslie added; "we might as well 'take it easy' till we see her."



He deposited himself comfortably in the corner of a deep, elastic sofa, shaded from the fire on one side by a plate-glass screen, and from a lamp on the other by a mass of spiky ferns.

Davenant, standing, his back to the blaze, looked about him with interest. The scheme of the room was old French, the fittings in pale brocades and gilt, superbly carried out by masters of their craft. Throughout, the taste was unimpeachable. A powdered marquise of the ancient régime might here have received courtiers and cardinals in high-heeled shoes.

But there was no mistress to complete it. The next arrival was an attaché of one of the foreign embassies at Washington, a swart man with beady black eyes, and black hair cut short and standing stiff upon his head. He was adorned with turquoise studs surrounded by diamonds, and stood shivering on the rug, complaining of the chill of the New York climate.

After another interval, Mr. Cleve appeared. The little gentleman had dressed hurriedly, for the bow of his necktie had worked around under one ear, and the lining of a pocket was displayed upon the tail of his coat.

"Knew it was no earthly use to be here when she asked me," he exclaimed, cheerfully submitting to Ainslie's repair of his disheveled toilet. "For heaven's sake, Ainslie, lend me a handkerchief—I've dropped mine putting it in my pocket; or I'll go send one of those fellows outside up to Jack's dressing-room to get me one of his. Thanks. A man should always carry two. Heard the last Boston story, about that electrical chap showing off his bath-tub?"



"Try another, Cleve," said Ainslie, lazily. "Everybody's heard that."

"Well, then, what do you say to Mark Twain's speech before a girls' college the other day?—when he remarked his ambition is to be a professor—of telling anecdotes?"

"Hush!" said Ainslie, mysteriously. "On no account divulge that here!"

"Eh! why not?" asked Cleve, much rattled. "By Jove, Ainslie, you startled me! I believe you just want to run me off the track!"

"My dear man, this is hardly the hour for humorous narration," said Ainslie. "For my own part, I am starving; I had nothing for luncheon to-day but six raw oysters, eaten while standing before a counter. There is within me a gnawing void that stories only irritate and do not fill. If our hostess does not soon show up, I shall go and beg for a biscuit in the pantry."

The arrival of Miss Gwynne, looking so crisply beautiful and unruffled that the hearts of two men leaped up within them at sight of her, was the prelude for Mrs. Stanley's descent like an empress among her guests.

Davenant, who led the way with her across a wide marble hall into a tapestried dining-room, discerned that it was their matron's fancy to single him out to-night for special favor. He envied old Cleve, upon whose cork-screwed coat-sleeve Sybil's hand rested, Ainslie and the diplomat bringing up the rear. What a bore it was going to be to dance attendance all the evening upon an oldish woman's coquetries! (That



phrase alone, as it became formulated in Davenant's mind, bewrayed him as an outsider to fashion.)

It was not until they were in Mrs. Stanley's landau on the way to the opera-house—the two young men following in a cab—that he had a moment's speech with Sybil.

"Did you enjoy the Crawfords?" was all he could think of to relieve his overflowing soul.

"Yes—no—I really forget," said she, laughing. "One does not remember a party two or three days old. I suppose it was like all the rest. You know how exactly they are alike."

"I have never been to a 'function' in town," he said simply—"at least of your kind. I suppose I might have done so had I not been too busy and too indifferent—till now."

"Now we are bringing you out," she said gleefully. "We shall conquer, never fear."

"I hope not. It would be a sad interruption to my pursuits. But I shall be deeply grateful for any crumbs you may choose to throw me of your companionship."

"My aunt has an afternoon affair soon, and I asked her to send you a card that you'll get to-morrow. It's a musicale, and there'll be men dropping in as late as seven."

"An afternoon affair," thought he, remembering his recent scorn of such methods of reunion. But he was now wise enough to know that this meant an opening of the door to him, behind which was to be found the chief delight of life—and so accepted the invitation.



The opera, which he had never seen from one of the parterre boxes, having for many seasons frequented it in the parquet stalls or galleries, might have been a dumb-show, except during those numbers when the famous singers occupied the stage. Then, only, the people about him stopped talking; the young men ceased to go and come, and bestow little squeezes of the hand in greeting and saying good-by to the ladies in the boxes; the whole vast assemblage focused its attention upon the greatest artists of the age. During these thrilling intervals Davenant felt the charm of vicinity to Sybil. Jostled to the rear by succeeding callers, he stood in the shadow, looking at the back of her graceful head and neck, and investing her with all the fantastic attributes of a lover's imaginings. Or else, wandering to some distant part of the house, he would enjoy her beauty from another point of view.

Ainslie, on the contrary, after hanging his hat and coat in the antechamber of the Stanleys' box, resorted with great diligence to calling upon his friends, appearing in turn in most of the boxes of the horseshoe, where he was well received, and seemed to enjoy himself with impartiality.

Once Mr. Cleve, who had been peppering his stories around the half-circle, came upon Davenant stalking about the lobby in solitary state.

"My dear fellow, stop with me, and let us have two whiffs of a cigarette," said Cleve, benignantly. "If we join any of those club gossips who are out here, we shall be talked to death; they are the most untiring fishers for scandal. And, do you know, I find it simply disgusting the way these millionaire stock-holders



put their heads together and speak about nothing but their schemes for amusing themselves."

"What are they to do? Their wealth handicaps them for politics. They have no excuse to work. To my mind, their Monte Cristo business is very picturesque."

"Don't mistake me. I'm not envious. So long as I get asked to their banquets, sail on their yachts, enjoy their operas, or make trips in their private cars, I'm quite comfortable, personally. But one feels oppressed by segregated fortunes. Look at these four chaps next us, for example. Fancy what their united incomes represent! It's fatiguing, I tell you. It robs the rest of us of ambition to make moderate incomes for ourselves. It's produced the dreadful discontent of modern good society. Why, man, in all the boxes where I've called to-night, I can hardly say I've seen one happy woman—one of the nice, jolly, restful kind of matrons, I mean, who can laugh outright, and enjoy fun, and speak naturally. Most of 'em are keeping watch on the others, to see they don't get ahead in the social race. If you want to see what I mean, just look at the difference in the women's faces when the house is quiet."

Davenant, guiltily aware of having looked at but one woman's face, could not, for the life of him, feel depressed by Mr. Cleve's jeremiads.

"The worst of it is the effect it has upon the young 'uns," went on Cleve. "The débutantes, like their mamas, are calculating how to keep along with the richest, most extravagant set in town. Nothing else seems to them worth living for. To see some of those



little rosy young faces kindle with scheming or unsatisfied longing makes me sick, I tell you. As to the young men, the whole lot of 'em, from club loungers to fellows that have just left college, are deliberately and confessedly 'on the make.' They won't waste themselves on girls whose mothers can't entertain 'em at dinner, or send 'em ball-tickets, or give 'em places at the opera. If the directors here wanted an emblem of high society to adorn the opera-house, they could n't have done better, in my opinion, than set up yonder, over the proscenium arch, the image of a golden calf."

"And yet you—" began Davenant, laughing.

"I am of 'high society'—certainly; but at least I pay my way by courtesy and civility and helping to make things go. Do you know why I like to put in a month in England every summer? Because there the greater the lady, the more unpretending she is. And if they love and covet wealth and place just as much as we do over here, they keep their longings in the background of every-day conversation. I went down this morning, by the way, and booked to sail in May in *Teutonic*."

"Lucky mortal!" said Davenant.

Although he affected to pooh-pooh them, Cleve's sharp strictures had begun to exert upon him a subduing influence. They made him realize the distance between Sybil and a brain-worker who could never hope to offer her any of these requisites of her set. Until now he had been overcome by the dazzling suggestions of his hope that she might grow to care for him. Such homes as those of Mrs. Grantham and Mr. Carnifex had not seemed to him impossible of



realization. The sumptuous domicile of Mrs. Stanley had affected him as merely one of the side-shows of modern plutocracy. The interior in which a man of moderate success in a professional career may hope to install the wife he loves was all-sufficient for Davenant's ambitions. But now that it appeared Mrs. Stanley's belongings were the standard, where was he in the race?

As he approached the box at the beginning of the last act, Ainslie, in high good humor, had but just come out of it.

"My dear fellow," he said, "it is as well you are going back. Our hostess is in the sulks. She thinks you have ignored her charms."

"But I was pushed out of my place," said Davenant, "by all that swarm of men."

"You should have held it, and let the whole house see you had eyes only for her."

"Why in the deuce did n't you tell me?"

"Because, at the rate you were swimming along with all these women,—Mrs. Stanley, Miss Carnifex, and Miss Gwynne swearing by you,—I thought you were an old hand. Never mind; there is time enough to redeem yourself. She has got only the attaché now, who bores her; while Miss Gwynne has her string full of men. Go and swell Mrs. Stanley's number, and all may yet be well."

"Otherwise?"

"You will be forgotten before the next opera night."

"I wonder Miss Gwynne is friends with that sort of a purposeless vagrant," said Davenant, irrepressibly.

"Miss Gwynne knows nothing better. Miss Gwynne,



taken out of these surroundings, would be completely at a loss. Miss Gwynne is intended to grace such an establishment as that we dined in to-night—to lead just such a life as her friend Mrs. Stanley.”

“Heaven forbid!” exclaimed Davenant, with warmth.

Something in the glow of his honest face warned Ainslie, who, stopping short, looked at him again.

“Don’t, my dear fellow, don’t!” he said briefly, with a sort of tightening about his mobile lips.

Davenant understood.

As they opened the box door it became apparent that Mrs. Stanley had a new visitor in the person of a man well on in years, smooth-shaven and intelligent-looking, his features marked with a thousand lines of care.

“Surely that is Mr. Mortimer,” said Davenant, who saw only the back hair of a celebrated capitalist.

“‘Incarnate electricity,’ they call him,” said Ainslie. “Only death will arrest his progress, though quite a number of fair ladies have tried to do so.”

“I know him well,” said Davenant.

His enormous success in affairs, his boundless popularity with the New York public, his vast interests in railroads networked over this continent and in other countries, made of this individual a power not to be overlooked. His face had been so variously reproduced for the benefit of his fellow-citizens that there was left for it only the immortality of a postage-stamp. When Davenant resumed his seat behind his hostess, she was saying in a wondering tone to Mr. Mortimer:



"But at five o'clock you were in Albany!"

"When I received your telephone message to dine with you and Miss Gwynne to-night—repeated to me from home—I was; but at 6:23 exactly I left the Albany station in a special consisting of my own car, a common coach for ballast, and the best of the new engines. At the end of two hours, thirty-six minutes, and nine seconds we ran into the Grand Central—too late to dine with you, but not too late, I trust, to present my compliments to the ladies."

"What gallantry!" exclaimed Mrs. Stanley. "It is too bad I never can think of asking people till so late."

Davenant saw that, although Sybil heard it, she did not honor Mr. Mortimer's flattering announcement by turning around. He also perceived that the great man bestowed in vain several pathetically anxious glances upon Sybil's profile.

This revelation, coupled with what a flash had revealed to him about Ainslie, could not be said to surprise Davenant. According to his way of thinking, it would have been natural had half the men in the opera-house experienced the same sweet pain. But when, after a few words with Mrs. Stanley, he gained possession of the chair behind Sybil, all the doubts, fears, revelations of the last hours since he had ventured into this her kingdom, fell away. Again he was possessed by the overpowering belief that it was he, and none other, who should assert his claim upon her and win her love. That accomplished, how was it possible for anything else to matter?

"You know Mr. Davenant?" asked Mrs. Stanley of



Mr. Mortimer, having seen a friendly nod exchanged between them.

"Yes; but I thought he was a misogynist, or at least a fashion-hater. I have never before seen him in society. He is a man of strong character; aggressive, but always polite; a hard hitter, a fearless adversary, of intense conviction and persistence—"

"Dear me!" interrupted the lady. "I was beginning to think there is nothing in him at all."

"I must go now," said Mr. Mortimer, rising. "A look in at the club, where I arranged to meet some men; then home, to spend half the night at work with my stenographer. There will be a reporter sitting on my door-step, another in the hall, and a third at the keyhole of my study. Good-by, and ask me to dinner again when I am not in Albany."

As he left the box, Miss Gwynne, forsaking her talk with Davenant, bestowed upon the man of affairs the tips of her white-gloved fingers. Mr. Mortimer, hesitating for a moment as if he would say something he could not exactly put into words, bowed, smiled, and withdrew.

"My dear, you are stony-hearted," said Mrs. Stanley, hardly waiting till their distinguished visitor was out of hearing. "If you but said the word, you'd have man, fortune, railroads, engines, newspapers, and reporters—all at your feet."

"I had as soon live with my ear to a telephone," said Sybil, curling her lip, "or in the engine-room of a ship."

"Ah, no," an audacious listener thought to himself; "there is something better in store for her than an



old man's infatuation. I am going to make her life glorious with my love."

DAVENANT no sooner made acquaintance with Sybil's natural protector, than he divined that lady's antagonism toward him. No doubt Mrs. Stanley had informed Mrs. Lewiston of the undisguised emotion Sybil had aroused in him on the two known occasions of their meeting. Sybil had taken care to say nothing to any one of that brief interview in the street the night of Mrs. Crawford's ball, the memory of which excited her more than she liked to admit to herself.

Mrs. St. Clair Lewiston was a high-nosed dame with a roseate countenance, a belle of the fifties, whose figure still gave assurance of being smartly laced. Her hair, much craped, and showing no beginnings or endings, was of a rich copper hue. Her friends thought it better had Mrs. Lewiston selected any other tint. Her costumes were rigorously *à la mode*, her ornaments confined to a few fine emeralds and sapphires long and favorably known in New York. But here her concessions to modernity ceased. While other people were discarding old furniture, Mrs. Lewiston pulled all of hers to the front. Her walls were a museum of early colonial relics. Since she could not equal Mrs. Stanley in American splendor, she had fallen back upon the pose of American aristocracy.

Some excuse might be made for this good lady's habitual stern expression of countenance. Seen driving alone in her victoria, her face revealed the wear and tear of a sad domestic experience. Her husband having died of consequences of dissipation, her only



son was now in a fair way to follow the paternal lead. "Young" St. Clair Lewiston did not, however, live at home. When he was not off on other people's yachts and four-in-hands, idling abroad, or lounging at the clubs, his prematurely aged face and form were consigned to the seclusion of chambers in a modish quarter up-town.

Mrs. Lewiston was fond of Sybil, after her lights. The distinction of chaperoning so successful an importation renewed in her some of her vanished zest in social intercourse. The girl, who was lonely for love, had put forth little feelers of affection that attached themselves in a way to her aunt's polished surface. In default of tenderness, which she did not possess, Mrs. Lewiston gave Sybil material bounty. It was not generally known that Sybil's income, owing to the heedless management of her peripatetic mother, had shrunk under poor investments to be a very slim affair. She was virtually dependent on her aunt. Mrs. Lewiston had already conveyed to her her intention, should Sybil make a suitable marriage, of doing by her as she would have done by a daughter of her own, her son St. Clair being already in possession of an independent fortune larger than was good for him. The only condition put upon this liberal offer was that during the first year or two of Sybil's married life she should form a common establishment with her aunt. "At least," Mrs. Lewiston had said, "until Annie James grows up"—Annie James being the daughter of an impecunious first cousin who might be depended upon to cede parental rights in that young person so soon as she had acquired inches and



accomplishments to justify her in succeeding Sybil as companion.

Mrs. Lewiston felt that in taking this attitude she was acting extremely well; and as long as Sybil showed no sign of intended marriage with any one, her aunt was all the better pleased. Experience had convinced her that a woman is peaceful only when there are no men in the house.

It will be judged, therefore, that, although lapped in luxury, Miss Gwynne was liable to be denuded, like Cinderella, of her finery. So little had the question of money or money's worth entered into Sybil's thoughts, this condition caused her no anxiety. She had been brought up by her mother in ignorance of the common struggles of mankind, since, if ever a pinch of necessity for funds had come to Mrs. Gwynne, she had met it by drawing on her principal.

MRS. LEWISTON, in a high toilet of black silk and gauze, incrustated on the upper and lower portions with beetles of glistening jet, stood near the door of her drawing-room, shaking hands disapprovingly with the guests bidden to her musicale. A prominent object of her attire was the largest of the Lewiston emeralds, worn as a brooch beneath her double chin. As soon as newcomers had been permitted a glimpse at this jewel, they were hastily passed along into the throng.

Davenant, whose name had been duly enunciated to his hostess by her butler, was honored by a stare. While he was still casting about for some speech that would preserve the golden mean between self-respect



and gratitude for her civility in asking him, the same functionary cut him short by announcing other guests.

"Miss Gwynne?" Peter managed to ask, by way of fixing his identity as an acquaintance of the house.

"My niece is in there," gruffly observed the hostess, pointing toward the middle room, wherein rows of gilt cane-seated chairs formed a barricade about a grand piano and some music stands.

"This great lady would make a capital matron for a city prison," said the outlaw, mentally. He felt certain she had heard of and disapproved his attentions to her niece.

Beneath an "acacia, waving yellow hair," he now beheld Sybil, garbed in some diaphanous texture of faint amber hue, with a large bunch of purple violets at her breast. While busily engaged in receiving the overflow of people from the front room, and in directing them to seats, she gave Davenant a smile that did not encourage him to follow the example of the crowd and pass up forward.

"May I—should I—stand here by you?" he asked eagerly, taking his place in the angle of a chimney-piece at her elbow.

"Not unless you are willing to be useful. Look at Mr. Ainslie, straightening chairs like an angel."

The banality jarred upon Davenant. It was quite out of his line to do anything "like an angel"; but, then, from her lips even nonsense was attractive.

"Let me stay where I can admire Ainslie," he said lightly. Already it was his ambition to fit himself to his surroundings. As one person after another spoke to her, he noted that she had some trifle light as air



for each in turn; that she returned interested comments upon information seeming to him like apples of the Dead Sea; that she was, in a word, thoroughly "of" her surroundings.

When Sybil was too much occupied to speak to him, Davenant could not forego hearing the chat that went on in his vicinity. He was measurably impressed by a close and intimate discussion between two ladies who talked, usually speaking both at once, concerning operations in surgery recently performed upon the husband of one and the daughter of the other. Pathological details, rattled off glibly and with evident relish, chilled his blood and revolted his sense of decency. From this the ladies went on to cooks; and by the time they had winged their flight to the remarriage of a celebrated divorcée the first number of the program cut them short. This was the startling apparition of four pretty and fashionably gowned young women, in the attitudes of Burne-Jones's seraphs, playing upon cornets, which performance, having created an American success in Mayfair the year before, had now returned to delight its native wilds. After this the usual list of songs and violin solos wore itself along.

Davenant, who saw Mrs. Grantham sitting in a corner, struggled across to her. Sybil having deserted him, his own coign of vantage had lost its value.

"I breathe free," said he, straightening himself in a doorway close to Katrina's retreat. "My dear madam, you were my fairy sponsor in polite circles. Shall I ever become one of those flexible, supple creatures, with all angles rubbed away, and unwearying calves, who *enjoy* it?"



"I fear I can hardly picture you as the perfected social animal."

"When I saw you I was just about to get upon my hind legs and roar, from fatigue."

"Have you seen Miss Carnifex? She is in yonder somewhere."

"Is she?" said he, without much interest and without looking round.

"Yes. I hear you dined with them Sunday. It is in her own home one sees Agatha at her best."

"Her father is a delightful old boy, I think. Looks like a sucking dove, and delivers himself of the most fiery sentiments. And the air of their house is refreshing."

This was well, but not good enough for Mrs. Grant-ham.

"Agatha needs only opportunity to develop as much tenderness as she has good sense and tact. It is as well, perhaps, that she did not marry early. She has had too many problems to work out."

"She is indeed an admirable girl," exclaimed Davenant, with interest; and, feeling encouraged, the match-maker went on:

"But if she marries now, Agatha should never separate from her father; it would break him up utterly. The man who seeks her should consider that."

"I should think Mr. Carnifex would be a sprightly addition to any establishment."

"Agatha's husband should make up his mind to hang his hat in Mr. Carnifex's front hall. That old house is its master's shell. Although he has a comfortable fortune, nothing would induce him to move



out. But it is really a huge house. Our old-fashioned New York dwellings, with the rooms on either side the hall, must remind you of your Southern homes. Mr. Carnifex's has always made me think of some I have seen in Richmond and Charleston."

"I hope no son-in-law will arise cruel enough to uproot the old gentleman," remarked Davenant, cheerfully.

Mrs. Grantham was silent for a minute. She felt that she had exhausted the subject of Mr. Carnifex's house.

"I met there a very jolly fellow called Ainslie," resumed Davenant.

"Ainslie!" she exclaimed. "Surely he is not your sort. They tell me he has been following after Sybil Gwynne for months and can do nothing for love of her."

Davenant's heart gave a guilty throb. Did his kind friend only know how much, in that respect, he was of Ainslie's "sort"!

"Miss Gwynne looks her loveliest to-day," he said, with an attempt to speak indifferently.

"I hope it is not because that man her mother wanted her to marry has just appeared again. Mrs. Arden tells me he is considered the most likely of all Miss Gwynne's suitors—one that even Mrs. Lewiston might look at without turning him into stone. Hush! There is Mme. Amethyst beginning a song. She is what we have all been waiting for, to make us forget the rest."

The skylark singing of a favorite prima donna might have been that of any other, for all Davenant



heard of it. Presently, when some people came to speak with Mrs. Grantham, he wandered off into the tea-room. Sybil, standing near the table, was in the act of pouring cream into a cup held by a fair man of fine proportions and soldierly bearing.

"That 's he—that 's Captain Cameron," said a girl, talking to her friend. What followed came to Davenant in snatches :

"He got in this morning, on the *Lucania*, and has lost no time."

"She looks flushed and nervous. I wonder if it 's a 'go'?"

"Everybody in Homburg said last summer she had thrown him over twice. Seems it 's an old affair. He 's one of the easy-going kind, apparently. A beauty; don't you think so?"

"Hum! not that; but he looks sensible and nice; and I like Scotchmen when they *are* nice. The great thing about him is his prospects. Lord Huntingtower's heir—and Lord Huntingtower 's past eighty. First name 's John, called Ian. Rather quaint, is n't it? He has an old house in the Vale of Strathmore. The Stanleys spent three days with him last year. Going on to Canada to join the staff of the governor-general."

"I don't care whether she 's refused him or not; any one with half an eye can see she 's badly rattled, now. Well as I know Sybil Gwynne, I never saw her look like that before."

Davenant stood rooted to the floor. For the first time in his life the rage of jealousy swelled in his heart. Not knowing how to deal with it, he walked out of the house.



## V



THE sight of Ian Cameron's kind, patient face always brought back to Sybil vividly the occasion of their first meeting, at a German watering-place, where her mother had once stopped for the cure, when Sybil was eighteen.

The two ladies, wearying of the monotony of meals in their sitting-room, had descended to the table d'hôte. The young soldier, detained in the dull place by a twisted ankle, found them an agreeable variety. From acquaintanceship on the ground of several friends in common, they had passed to friendship. Cameron had found time to join them at Dinard later on, where Mrs. Gwynne was profiting by her cure so far as to attempt to enjoy life with the fashionable world. Cameron, seeing in the haggard woman's face that which her daughter could not see, urged Mrs. Gwynne to give up gaiety, and go to a quiet little village in Brittany, where he knew of a house in which she might be comfortable. Mrs. Gwynne, acquiescing in this suggestion with a sort of gasping eagerness to find some one who would take the direction of her affairs out of her hands, betrayed her physical and mental weakness. She was indeed in a deplorable



condition. Death at hand, her money matters in disorder, her natural friends and protectors in America, she felt overwhelmed with a longing for her forsaken birthplace, coupled with a shuddering dread of her last journey home, in a box down in the hold of a tossing ship.

They went to the little country house suggested. Sybil, frightened and helpless, knew not what else to do. An old governess (an Englishwoman who had trained several Ladies Ermyntre and Honorable Ethels for their world, before taking in charge the young American) came back at her call, and remained with her until the end. Her mother's French maid, the *garde-malade*, and the doctor were, otherwise, in that dread moment the only substitutes for a family circle. Before death came, Mrs. Gwynne told Sybil that young Cameron had spoken of his hope one day to make her his wife, of his good prospects and connections, and, finally, had offered to marry Sybil at once. But Sybil, who cared for him only as a friend of both storm and sunshine, could not give her mother the assurance she desired.

The arrival of Mrs. Lewiston directly after her sister's demise, and while yet the survivors were undergoing the experience that makes the formalities after death in a foreign country so much more distressing than at home, gave Sybil a refuge. Her aunt, who had for years been in strained relations with her mother, was attracted by the girl's grace and beauty, and determined at once to appropriate them. Sybil, with tears and thanks, had bidden farewell to her honest suitor; and Cameron, hard hit by the pretty crea-



ture, went off determining to put her out of his thoughts forever.

When he had next met her, three years later, Sybil was the queen-rose of a rosebud garden of American and English girls at gay Homburg. She was well placed, admired, reputed to be the heiress of her wealthy relative. Upon her had been set the cachet of royal notice; and a duchess of his acquaintance had told Cameron that one could see Miss Gwynne had been brought up out of America.

Welcomed by Sybil with unexhausted gratitude and kind remembrance, he had seen her every day for a week, at the end of which time he had proposed to her again, and was again refused. The day following this second misadventure saw Cameron returning to England. In addition to his usual luggage, he carried with him the girl's affectionate assurance that although she could not see her way to marry him, it was only because she did not consider her want of love a counterpart to sincere and chivalrous devotion such as his. She had every confidence in him; he was the most noble and loyal friend she had ever had: but indeed, indeed, she had no wish to marry Cameron or any one. She had a great deal more of life to know before she could settle down. Had not she, for example, passed only a single winter in America since she had left off living there at the age of twelve?

Toward the close of Sybil's second season in America, Cameron had, as has been seen, suddenly made his appearance in New York. Through their mutual acquaintance Mrs. Stanley (whom he had called upon before luncheon, almost as soon as he had changed his



clothes at his hotel, after driving up-town from the docks) the gallant captain had ascertained the address of his charmer. Mrs. Stanley had also informed him of the festivity on the cards at the Lewiston mansion that afternoon, and had invited him to let her pick him up at his hotel and drive there.

At four o'clock Cameron had been ready, and eagerly ambulant through the corridors of the hostelry. About half-past five Mrs. Stanley's footman had peered in the vestibule doors, and requested a hall-boy to inform Captain Cameron that the carriage was in waiting. A little later, as we have seen, he reached Mrs. Lewiston's, after the music, but in time for tea.

There is no saying that Sybil was not stirred by the apparition of her faithful knight. As soon as she looked into his eyes she knew what he had come for. The fiction of his intention to go to Canada might serve with the general public. Sybil understood him, and trembled. When she had parted with him last, it was with the feeling that she had made a narrow escape from surrendering her freedom into his hands; and now, though this was the western hemisphere, nothing could protect her from again running the same risk.

Sybil's bold determination was to assume with him the cordial, friendly attitude he deserved; to be so friendly, indeed, that her unquenchable suitor might see from the beginning there could be between them no question of another tie. But she reckoned without her public of New York.

For the talk of the town, temporarily lacking an-



other subject, centered itself with almost passionate activity upon the engagement reputed to exist between Miss Gwynne and Captain Cameron. The unfortunate young people found themselves exposed to a publicity such as is attracted to two great nations on the verge of war. Not only were all known, and many imagined, incidents in the history of both brought up for discussion at dinners, teas, balls, and clubs, but that last misery of sentient man befell them—the newspapers took them up. Cameron, an unassuming young man who had visited New York before and enjoyed its brilliant hospitality, bore his ordeal with good humor and philosophy. But one day, coming down-stairs at his hotel, he found the hall porter and a bell-boy with their heads together, giggling over the head-lines beneath two dreadful pictures purporting to be of him and the young lady in the case :

A CAPTAIN WHO EXPECTS TO BE AN EARL!

---

AN AMERICAN MISS WHO WOULD LIKE TO BE A  
COUNTESS!

---

MAYBE SHE WON'T GET HIM, AFTER ALL!

This was more than flesh and blood could bear. The Scotchman, filled with wrath, chafed impotently when he found there was no practicable way to punish the authors of the outrage. There was absolutely nothing he could do, short of dragging her name with his before the police courts, except to com-



pose himself and try to forget the exquisite annoyance.

Sybil, who saw no newspapers, suffered less than he. Her trial lay in the general assumption of her friends that her affair with Cameron must end in marriage. The redeeming circumstance about the whole situation was that Cameron himself now never mentioned that exigent word. He was "nicer" than ever, Sybil owned to herself. If she could only be sure that he hated her, or at least preferred one of the many other girls he saw daily in the recurrent meetings of their set! But something told her that this was not the case.

In the midst of this confusion of mind she did not forget that she had not seen Mr. Davenant since the afternoon when he had slipped away from her aunt's musical party without saying farewell. The separation was not quite his fault, since cards, left by him upon Mrs. Lewiston and Miss Gwynne, had been found upon two occasions, at a week's interval, lying on the hall table. But Sybil met him nowhere. Mrs. Grant-ham had told her once that Davenant was tremendously busy just now in the Something-or-Other Trust case, and later on that he had come out of it with laurels. Sybil saw by this that he did not permit sentimental interest to interfere with the serious business of his life; but she could not help wishing she *had* interfered so far as to effect another meeting. She missed the heart-throbs he had brought to her, the charm of his reverent homage. Once she thought,—then put it aside with a guilty blush,—had Ian Cameron been able to stir in her this emotion, there



would have been less demur in recognition by her of his fitness as a husband.

In many respects Cameron suited and pleased her well. He understood her tastes, fancies, allusions to things and people previously known. He represented an existence that, as her days in America went on, she felt a longing again to blend with. She liked more and more to recall the images of restful English life; its rich perfectness, its well-ordered privacy, its simplicity of habit during a greater part of the year, contrasted with the liberal gaiety of its London season, and many peeps into Continental centers of society. That life as a constancy would be a thing very unlike her nomadic journeyings with her mama, her presentations at "half the courts of Europe," her girlish triumphs in the cosmopolitan society of certain German spas.

Cameron had once told her that, if she married him, although they would be only fairly well off, she would find his ancestral Scottish home a choicer possession, from an antiquarian's point of view, than either of Lord Huntingtower's dwellings, of which they would ultimately come into possession. He had given Sybil photographs of this historic haunt of his in the lovely Vale of Strathmore; and often, amid the rush of New-World life, she had looked at these pictures with a sort of tender longing. She was most tempted, perhaps, by the old north-country gardens, with their masses of flowers, their turf walks of soft green velvet, their pyramids of box, eagles of holly, and peacocks of yew keeping guard to-day as they did three hundred years ago. She had seen and loved so many such



pleasances within the circle of the British Isles! And these now offered to her were said, upon the authority of the Stanleys, to be among the loveliest and rarest in the land.

One morning Sybil had taken out her photographs and was scanning them. From the exterior, with its mullioned windows and ivy-shrouded walls, to the vaulted halls and "dining-parlor," lined with old Spanish leathers—from the galleries full of family portraits, under which the American girl might walk as one of the line, to the great, quaint, shadowy, oak-paneled morning-room that had been Ian's mother's, and would be his wife's—she passed in turn. Just then Sybil received a visit from her aunt.

With a blush, she swept the pile of pictures to one side of her table, but not before Mrs. Lewiston had observed the nature of her preoccupation.

"Good gracious, child! you need not mind my seeing that you are taking that into consideration," said the lady, in a clear, brisk voice. "It is just what you ought to do, in fact. Things have got to such a pass now, you must come to some other definite decision."

"I think not, Aunt Elizabeth," faltered Sybil, reddening to the roots of her hair, and looking ready to burst into tears.

"You can't be supposed to know how the outside world is making busy with your affair; but St. Clair tells me you are the talk of the newspapers and clubs, and, unless your engagement is officially announced, either Captain Cameron will have to take himself off to Canada, or I shall have to go with you to Florida or Bermuda, or some of those tiresome places."



Again the blushes dyed Sybil's face.

"It is through no fault of mine, Aunt Elizabeth, that you are subjected to these inconveniences. You know whether I have encouraged him to come here."

"It would have been well enough, but for the press," said the angry lady. "You know Bermuda bores me, and Florida is so wretchedly far off."

"What do you wish me to do?" asked the girl, drooping her fair head submissively.

"I don't know. I asked St. Clair to come in to dinner to-night, and talk it over; and perhaps he will. It is his duty to advise us. But it is so hard to get him to speak; all he said was, I've no right to bind you by an agreement to live with me if you marry a British subject; he said it's uncommon rough on Cameron. And so, thinking it over, I've come in to tell you I'll make this agreement: If you marry Cameron, I'll give you the same allowance I promised all along, and either I'll take a house in London for the season, where you'll stop with me, or you'll both come over to Newport and stay until the autumn. Of course, when Annie James comes to live with me I will let you off. And St. Clair says I ought to give you the money outright that will bring in the income I promised you."

"St. Clair has always been good to me," said Sybil, touched by this unexpected kindness.

"Yes; he likes you; he says you make no demands upon him. Poor boy! but for his wretched health, he might marry himself, and— Sybil, you know I am no friend to marriage *for women*; but, if it's got to be, I think Cameron is the best for you. If my sister had



lived up to the traditions of our family in New York, —if she had, like myself, stood before society as a type of the old aristocracy of our land,—things might have been different. But you are totally unfit for life over here. You know nothing, and care less, for our national history. Why, I believe you have hardly cut the leaves of those volumes I took such pains to select for your shelves.”

“I have so little time to read, aunt,” replied the recreant, with a guilty glance at a pair of John Fiske’s delightful volumes upon the American Revolution, lying on the table, with a silver book-mark very near page 1 of Volume I.

“Of course—and little inclination. But, as I said, Cameron is the best husband for you. These young fellows you dance with have neither money to support wives, nor wish to assume the responsibility. Mr. Mortimer—”

“Don’t speak of him!” cried the girl.

“It would be an excellent position. But he is, of all people in town, essentially an American. His tastes and yours would never fit. I doubt if he would take time to run over to Europe once in two years. If you accepted him, you’d have to settle down to nothing but New York.”

“Oh, Aunt Elizabeth,” cried Sybil, throwing her arms wearily into the air, “if you knew how hard this is for me to bear!”

“There are times in every woman’s life, my dear, when she must consent to look things in the face; and this is yours. For my part, I can’t think what has become of our marriageable men. In our day—your



poor mother's and mine—there were so many more than now. St. Clair says it's because the girls expect so much; the men make up their minds not to try. He says, too, the girls are all aiming for such high game, they let ordinary chances slip. That is the way men talk among themselves. In this age men are so horrid about women."

"Everything is horrid!" exclaimed Sybil, her lip trembling.

"Well, child, since it is evident you are in an obstinate mood, I'll say no more for the present, except that I wish to mention Britton having brought to me several cards, left recently, of that Mr. Davenant you met at Katrina Grantham's. Now I don't deny the Granthams' good birth and antecedents, but I am told they receive—ahem!—very queer people. I asked St. Clair about Mr. Davenant, and he said he never heard of the fellow in any of his clubs. I think it is very forward of him to call here so often, upon such slight acquaintance. He is probably a nobody who wants to get in with established families."

"Ask Mr. Carnifex what he thinks of Mr. Davenant," answered the girl, with spirit. "Ask anybody who knows something outside of our little narrow circle."

"You have been seeing that young man?" quickly countered Mrs. Lewiston.

"Only where I have told you, except once, when he joined me on the street for a few minutes' walk. But there is no reason why I should not see him, Aunt Elizabeth. He is every whit as good as the best we know. He is more clever and learned than any one we know."



"I have it, on good authority, that the Granthams' friends are queer," insisted Mrs. Lewiston, obstinately closing her lips; "and whatever this—er—person—may be, St. Clair has never heard of him in any of the clubs."

"He belongs to the Academical, for one," said Sybil, blushing at her own weakness.

"Eh! St. Clair does not belong to the Academical," answered Mrs. Lewiston, with finality. "In any case, Sybil, I do not care to have Mr. Davenant coming to my house. If you are to marry Cameron, you cannot receive another person who has either fallen in love with you upon ridiculously short acquaintance, or is using you to push himself into society. I may as well tell you that he called again yesterday; but as I had given Britton orders to say the ladies were not at home, the matter ended with two cards. Now, child, think over what I have said; take, if you like, a week to consider it. If you are not going to have Cameron, tell me, and we will leave town for somewhere—dear knows where. They tell me people under our circumstances go a great deal now to the Virginia Springs."

"Do you mean people who are hounded by the gossip of newspapers and the opinion of those they don't respect?" said Sybil, hotly.

But the expression of her aunt's face, set in pride of her own opinion—the knowledge of her ideas, hide-bound in prejudice—stopped further outburst upon the girl's part. She curbed herself so far as to kiss her Aunt Elizabeth upon a brow like polished granite, and to show her a new ball-dress that had just come home for Mrs. Stanley's "little dance" on the morrow.



That evening, at the opera, she saw Davenant in the stalls, alone. He looked grave and care-worn, and Sybil's heart—her vagrant heart of youth—went out in joy at sight of him, in sympathy with the cloud upon his face. She was sitting in the box of Mrs. Arden, whom Davenant did not know, and feared he would not understand that he was free to call on her. In addition, Captain Cameron was of their party, and several times the lorgnons of the house had veered around to center upon the group.

"What it is to be the chaperon of the 'Cynthia of the minute'!" said Mrs. Arden to Cameron. "Do you know, although you may n't believe me, I should n't want one of my girls to have the belleship of Sybil Gwynne. How in the world is a girl who has tasted it ever going to do without it in her after life?"

"I can think of but one remedy," said he, smiling—"another hemisphere. Fortunately, Miss Gwynne has a balance and a sweetness of temper that enable her to keep unspoiled."

"You don't spoil women in your part, certainly," said the lively widow. "When I remember the way nice women stand around, and follow after, and let themselves be dictated to by husbands and lovers, and even by brothers, in England!"

"Yet they seem satisfied with us," rejoined the captain, carelessly. He had had so much of international discussion. Just now his whole thoughts were concentrated in the honest hope to win and carry away from these hothouse surroundings the girl he had loved for years. Once bring her to accept him for a husband, it would be an easy matter to accomplish the



reasonable happiness of their two lives. But something had now entered into her life and thoughts that Cameron could not understand. She was no longer the simple, transparent being who had refused to marry him because she had never known love. Her secret, if she had one, eluded him. He was tempted to think this another phase of that infinite complexity, womanhood.

To-night, Cameron, feeling that matters were coming to a crisis, had, while sitting by her at dinner, infused into his talk with her a more proprietary warmth than he had ventured on before. She had been agitated, had shrunk away, but had not entirely turned from him her countenance. During the evening he did not once sit in the chair behind hers, or seem to look at her; but the cool captain had his eyes fully open to what was going on. He had seen her face light suddenly as she identified some one in the stalls, to whom she had bowed with a gracious but shy smile. Shortly after, he had observed the arrival of a new caller, a tall, dark, forceful man of striking individuality, who, duly named to Mrs. Arden as Mr. Davenant, had then fallen into close conversation with Miss Gwynne. Cameron, divining what he did not desire to think, with a fine instinct arose and went out of the box.

"It has been so long since I have seen you," said the girl to Davenant, trying to appear unconcerned, but succeeding rather ill.

"Yet I have called repeatedly. Is it possible you did not get my cards?"

"New York is too big," she said evasively. "We are too busy, too selfish, too bent on our own devices,



too scattered. Nobody is 'at home' now, unless to a raft of people."

"A man can't keep up going forever and never getting in."

"If we were in London in the season, and could stray out into Hyde Park and sit upon penny chairs everything would come to us; but here one never runs upon any one outdoors where it's possible to stop and talk without blocking up the street."

"Do your 'people' not walk?" he asked, eagerness in his gaze. "Would you come with me to our park?"

"From the Marble Arch to the Obelisk, and then 'take a walk,'" she said, laughing. "What a magnificent distance you are laying out!"

"Then you hold out to me no hope?" he replied in an impassioned undertone. "I may not call; we may never meet. What remains for me?"

Sybil would have given anything in reason to control her heart-throbs at that moment. Her voice, shaking as she tried to answer him lightly, played her false.

"I will walk with you," she said rapidly. "I think you would not find it pleasant to call for me at my aunt's house. I shall be leaving Mrs. Stanley's tomorrow at four o'clock. If you are there, we may stroll down the Avenue together."

"Mrs. Stanley hardly knew me when I bowed just now," he said, bewildered; "but if you say so, I shall be there."

Sybil, who had never before made an arrangement of this unconventional nature, had no sooner seen him go than she would have recalled it. Her concession could surprise no one more than it had herself.



"That is a man I have often wanted to see," said Mrs. Arden, leaning over to Sybil. "I understand he is 'booked' to marry Agatha Carnifex."

"I had not heard of it," murmured Sybil, faintly.

"I forget who told me. One hears so many things. But it is certainly suitable; don't you think so?"

"I suppose so."

"They are just the couple to found a New York household of the higher substantial sort—heads of the community, and all that. Agatha will go on presiding over committees, and his name will be in every list of eminent citizens. They say Mr. Carnifex is enchanted with his future son-in-law."

"When did this happen? Are you sure? Are they old enough acquaintances?" asked Sybil, confused and wretched.

"For the life of me, I can't remember. I wonder if it came from Katrina Grantham, whose 'swan' he is? Perhaps; but I don't know, really."

A new batch of callers distracted them. The shock of what she had heard nerved Sybil to sit upright, to talk and laugh with unusual animation. In no other way could she cover the blank dismay of her feelings.

In the lobby Davenant came upon the ever-cheerful Mr. Hamilton Ainslie.

"Saw you in there a moment since," said Ainslie, indicating vaguely Mrs. Arden's box. "I fancy you know that all the rest of us have pretty much thrown up the sponge. Old Mortimer has gone West in a special. Our ancient playfellow, Mrs. Stanley, thinks the engagement will be out shortly."

"What engagement?" asked Davenant, brusquely.



"Miss Gwynne's with Cameron. He is a deuced good fellow, let me tell you. He will never bore her; he will treat her well. The place he gives her will fit like a glove. The more I've thought it out, the better I'm satisfied she won't do over here. With every wish to adapt herself, she's not adaptable. She can't go on in her present line forever, don't you know. And after that—what? I confess I can't see."

"You believe she wishes to marry him?"

"I believe she will marry him. I don't see who's to prevent it. I can't, much as I'd like to. Must you go? Good-by. We'll have a spin together some of the fine spring days."

Davenant, from his seat in the parquet, gave one more glance into Mrs. Arden's box. He saw Sybil in conversation with Cameron, whose manner was nervous, his quiet face flushed with excitement. Many others noticed this little episode. It was the first time any one could say he or she had seen Miss Gwynne show her suitor such public favor.

The next day Davenant received a note from Sybil asking him to excuse her from filling the engagement to walk, that she felt she had made too hastily.

And the next week it was announced by the papers that Miss Gwynne had gone with her aunt, Mrs. Lewiston, to the Virginia Springs. Captain Cameron being still seen in his usual haunts about town, the surmise was that on their return the time for the nuptials would be given to the world. By and by, when Cameron departed to make his long-deferred visit to the Canadian provinces, the gossips were thrown off the scent; and for a time they said nothing at all.



## VI



URING the months following the crash of Davenant's air-castle he formed the habit of going frequently to visit Mr. and Miss Carnifex. His need of refined and sympathetic companionship had now become urgent. There was no one living of whom he would have made a confidant. To have loved Sybil was a glory, to have lost her a consequence to be expected by common sense. So brief, so passionate a dream might seem to others incredible; to him it was a reality that could not pass. In any case, he was not one to wear his heart upon his sleeve for even a friend's investigation.

But he craved friends, and in the Carnifexes found, if not healing, comfort for his wounds. That amiable old worldling, Mr. Carnifex, proved to be a mine of information, philosophy, and quaint comment concerning the community and people of New York. Nothing that had occurred here in business or society for the last fifty years had escaped his notice or passed out of his tenacious memory. He had lived to see the great social-equality theory of democracy fall quite to pieces at the end of the first century in the leading



city of the republic, to see new classes formed, new grades and distinctions assert themselves, with nobody to say them nay. His old pleasant life among his compeers and associates was gone. Poor Mr. Carnifex, after roving about among the houses of his friends and at his club, would often come back to his library, and drop down into his chair, determined to rove no more. Under these conditions, the society of Davenant was a boon, and to Davenant he attached himself with almost pathetic devotion.

With Agatha, Davenant advanced more slowly along the path of mutual confidence and esteem; but theirs was growing to be as good an example of friendship between the sexes as this troublous world can offer.

Ainslie, whom he encountered occasionally at the Carnifexes', was the only one who seemed to have discerned Davenant's feeling for Sybil. Since Ainslie was himself occupied in the task of trying to forget her, he gave no hint of his suspicions. What Agatha knew about either man's feelings, nobody knew. She was the rare woman who keeps impressions to herself.

One Sunday, after riding all the morning through the tender greens of a late-April landscape, Davenant dropped in to luncheon with the Granthams, whom he found in the throes of deciding upon their summer plans.

"Help me, Davenant," said Mowbray Grantham, pausing in the act of carving a pair of fowls. "These womenkind of mine, my wife and Katty, are pressing for a vote from me which I know, and they know, will carry no possible weight. We are, in imagination, making the circuit of the country. I go to bed in one



rural resort, get up in another, go down-town believing myself established for the summer at a third. By dinner-time they have found an entirely new place, where—but that I know we shall move out of it, bag and baggage, in a day or two—I might be resigned to settle down and thank God for a place of rest.”

“The whole trouble,” began Mrs. Grantham, patiently waiting till her lord had said his say, “lies in the way rich people have spoiled the nice places for those of moderate means. By the time I bring my girl and boys home from a summer at —, or —, or —, they are set up with ideas of expenditure perfectly ruinous to a professional income.”

“That is very virtuous, O mother in Israel,” quoth her husband; “but where is she who desires her young to be deprived of the advantages and enjoyments of their set? In my day—”

“Papa, you know I do not allow you to have had a ‘day’ yet,” cried his saucy Katty, with an admiring glance at him.

“In my day,” went on Grantham, imperturbably, “we young people got our pleasures without price. We roamed, shot, fished, and played in the free open. Now all joys must be paid for at the highest market rates. If your boy wheels, his machine must be one of the current year. If he golfs, there are subscriptions and an outfit of the best. If he fishes or shoots—I cease to contemplate the cost of those amusements! And then, girls—”

“Certainly a girl must have things not necessary for a boy. But I am sure our children are all perfectly reasonable, poor dears,” mused Mrs. Grantham.



"If it were not for the effort of Katty's coming out—"

"Mummy dear," cried Katty, buoyantly, "if my coming out is going to plunge the family into such trouble, I think I'd rather stay in. Anyhow, the boys and I had a thousand times rather go back to the farm, and have some fun, than to one of those prim, dress-up-and-visity places."

"You are lucky enough to possess a family homestead, are n't you?" asked the visitor of his hostess.

Mrs. Grantham's eyes, seeking her husband's, then Katty's, assumed a pensive and apologetic expression.

"We had determined to try to find a tenant for Hillcote this year," she said, hesitating.

"The truth is, Davenant," supplemented Grantham, "my ancestral domain, in a stony and unproductive region of western Massachusetts, has cost me so much money to 'restore' it according to my wife's ideas—"

"What about your experiments in agriculture?" interrupted Katrina, softly.

"—we can hardly afford to live there," pursued Mr. Justice Grantham. "Last year we got it off our hands to an estimable family, who at once went to Europe, leaving their horses, servants, an invalid daughter, a trained nurse, and a governess in possession."

"I wish you could have seen my chintz covers in the drawing-room afterward," interpolated the hostess, "and two bedrooms that have to be painted and papered new."

"But we must own that our tenants paid their way," said Grantham. "I am going to tell you also, Davenant, that it is n't the expensiveness of Hillcote that



is the drawback, so much as the remoteness. Our very first season there, my wife and daughter and one son fancied they must have a month at the seaside for change—”

“Oh, oh!” cried Mrs. Grantham and Katty in concert, “you know it was really measles, and the doctor ordered us to go.”

“Let me give Davenant my experience as a beacon-light to young men intending matrimony. I inherited that farm from my grandfather, and had a sentiment for it that need not be explained. I should have liked to go back there for my summer vacation, and live the old life just as it was. But the occasion offered too good an opportunity to my decorative wife not to be improved. New-Yorkers then were in the full flush of restoring old houses in new-old fashion. My wife had a nest-egg of a few thousands she wanted to put into our ‘summer home.’ We committed ourselves to the mercy of a young architect who was said to have a ‘strong feeling’ for the revival of early American art in house-building. After he had done with us we had a strong feeling of empty American pockets. The old house had taken on a fine style and complexion. Eccentricities my good Puritan forebears had never dreamed of cropped out everywhere. But my wife said it was ‘too beautiful for anything’; and I suppose she knew. All of one winter she spent in ransacking curiosity-shops for furniture. She would send home dejected specimens of second-hand chairs, sofas, and four-post beds, brasses, mirrors, and the like. She even bought a worsted fire-screen that she said ‘ought to have been’ worked by my Aunt Pamela. I am not



sure she did not purchase an imaginary portrait of my Aunt Pamela. For the hall we had English hunt-scenes, for the dining-room black old engravings that would frighten you. But Mrs. Grantham is always essentially correct—"

"Please, papa," cried Katty, "let me interrupt, to tell Mr. Davenant that Hillcote is now the prettiest old model farm-house in Massachusetts. And may I tell him, too, about your vegetable-garden—how much the peas cost apiece by the time we got them on the table—and the strawberries?"

"My father does his farming by long-distance telephone from his chambers," said one of the school-boys, with a mischievous look.

"How about those hogs, papa?" added the other lad, evidently touching some family joke. "Oh, don't let 's talk about going anywhere but to Hillcote!" he burst out fervently.

"Agreed!" said Katty.

"Agreed!" cried the older boy.

"Carried!" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands. "Mummy darling, if you knew how I hate dancing and prancing and going to dinners in summer-time, you 'd never take me to Newport or Lenox or Bar Harbor. Keep all the money you 'd have spent on our finery, and let us have the farm."

"And be a ruined parent at the end of the season," said Grantham; but it was easy to see that his sympathies were with his young ones.

"You see, Mr. Davenant, how our juveniles rule us," observed Katrina, as, upon Peter's declining a cigar with his host, she returned with him to her drawing-



room. "I don't doubt they will end by having their own way. And, should we go to Hillcote, you must promise to make us a visit there. The only neighbors of any consequence we have are the Stanleys, who own a fine house built on a great wide-spreading estate a few miles distant, where they keep up a stock-farm, but rarely go. Not once since we fitted up our farm-house has she been there. Etta goes abroad every spring, returns to Newport in July, and spends the autumn at Lenox or elsewhere. From year's end to year's end, she is never out of harness for the gay world."

"No wonder your charming little daughter avoids such an example," said Davenant. "You are good to let me have a glimpse of home life and natural talk in this reign of artificiality."

"It is all natural talk in our house," said she, smiling with a tender thought of her brood. "With all the abuse we Americans have to stand, I claim for us average people an intimacy of domestic life, a unity of interest with our children, that you see in few other countries. My boys and my girl are the best part of my existence, and their habit of confidence sweetens the bitter drops of the daily cup."

"You must have few of those," put in Davenant, with a half-sigh.

"Who has n't some?" she returned. "What two wedded lives, with their outgrowths, ever ran an even, unbroken course? A man thinks when he gets the woman he loves, and a girl thinks when she gives herself, that they will be always superior to petty differences—that they will set a pace for others to keep



up with. Ah me! This world is nothing but going on from day to day, living as best one can, hoping, striving, falling, and scrambling up again. When you marry, pray for adaptability to your other half; pray also to recognize your limitations, and to fit yourself to them."

"I am not likely to formulate any petitions of the kind," he said with an attempt to smile.

"Some day!" she answered in a lighter vein.

Katrina had heard of his frequenting the Carnifex establishment. She was careful not to say anything direct upon this theme, but in her heart determined, if his visit to Hillcote did come off, she would somehow afford him an opportunity to make better acquaintance with Agatha.

"And, speaking of Mrs. Stanley," went on Mrs. Grantham, "she is just about sailing for the other side, to do her usual spring shopping in Paris. Miss Gwynne goes with her—why, this is Sunday! They sailed yesterday."

Not a muscle betrayed Davenant's feeling.

"Sybil Gwynne has been very nice in calling upon me two or three times lately; but I've always missed her. When she came back with her aunt from Virginia, that good-for-nothing son of Mrs. Lewiston's was taken ill in his mother's house, and Sybil was the only person he would allow to sit by him in his convalescence. His mother, dear knows, would make any invalid wretched by her presence. Sybil was very sweet and unselfish, but when he recovered she began running down herself; so Etta Stanley persuaded Mrs. Lewiston to let Sybil go abroad with her. Of course



people say Miss Gwynne's pale looks and general abstraction are due to her approaching marriage with Captain Cameron. That is such a common feature of engagements! But no one knows whether she is to marry him or not. There has been no announcement. The shopping business in Paris is confirmatory. If it is true, there goes another one of our choice maidens to swell the ranks of the British aristocracy! It is astonishing what a lot of them we have lost. And it's quite absurd to say their matches have not turned out well. There are as many prizes and as many blanks in the marriage lottery over there as in ours. Sybil Gwynne, for instance, will be happier than she could have been with anybody in New York."

"Upon what do you base your assertion?"

"Chiefly the parrot-cry of her set: 'Who is there for her to marry here?' Whatever she was intended for by her Maker, shaping and training have not fitted her to be the helpmate of a good American."

THE first day out at sea! Sybil quitted the deck state-room wherein her friend Etta reclined upon a broad bed, covered by her own luxurious *duvet*, attended by an effusive maid and the cunning stewardess, and looking so yellow and ghastly it was as well Mr. Stanley kept himself severely within the smoking-room, where he usually played poker from shore to shore of the Atlantic. Leaning over the rail, the girl looked westward. Ainslie, who had come down to the dock to see her off at the last minute, had casually told her that he'd been to the theater the night before with the Carnifexes, and it was all rubbish to suppose



Agatha meant to marry Peter Davenant. Agatha had, in fact, as much as told him of her persistent intention to remain unwed.

"I once fancied he was hard hit by you," the young fellow had added, in the midst of a mob of swarming, struggling women carrying bouquets, who had come on board to see the departure of their idol, the great pianist.

There had stood the artist, with his silk hat set on the back of his leonine locks, with his bare throat and turn-down collar, with his pale, intellectual face wearing an expression of abject boredom. Here had surged the women. Above the clack of tongues, the babel of noise from dock and shipboard, the sonorous clashing of the band, the bell warning loiterers to be off had sounded for the last time.

"And you decided he is too big and wise a man to waste himself upon an idle trifler of my kind?" Sybil had answered, a bitter note in her voice.

"I at least am not," had answered Ainslie, with a look of unwonted gravity. "*Bon voyage!* This coming down to the ships that are sailing for the other side is one of the severest tests of my friendship. If I always want to go on them, fancy how I feel now!"

"Some President will have to send you out as secretary of an embassy."

"That would undo all these years of striving. No, no! Let me alone, and in the course of time I may come out a good American."

"Do go; you will get left," Sybil had urged.

"Then good-by, once more. The chief steward will keep you supplied with white violets till about Queens-



town; they are in his ice-box, and I hope won't prove messy. Think of me sometimes."

His hand clasped hers. The gaze of his clear blue eyes wore a look of lover's longing.

"There is no hope for me—*ever*?" he asked in a thick whisper.

"No, no. Good-by, good-by!" Sybil had answered—in her agitation lest he should be left putting her gloved hand against his breast to press him from the ship.

To-day she went over again what Ainslie had told her. The relief of knowing that Davenant was free filled her with joy. She almost forgot to sympathize with poor, faithful, handsome Ainslie; and for a time she quite forgot Ian Cameron, to whom she had promised to give a final answer on arriving at their hotel in Paris.

This exuberance went with her across the ocean, that, after two boisterous days, settled down into lamblike gentleness.

Nearing the Irish coast, they held aboard the usual concert, this time to be made forever memorable to its patrons. The ship's company gathered like bees in the saloon. The piano, tuned for the occasion, was to be touched by the famous magician. It was almost too good to be true!

A little while and he took his seat. There was breathless silence while he played on, on, without break except to change the melody. No matter what the theme, his fingers gave it harmony divine, and fitted it to the magic of the hour. Afloat on the wide ocean, the sound of the screws scarcely heard in the



quiet sea that pulsed against the great ship's sides—an hour of enchantment, of rest, of tender reverie.

When Sybil laid her down that night she had reached the conclusion that was to color all her life. In vain had poor Ainslie's violets wasted their sweetness in a frozen atmosphere.



## VII



IDSUMMER in the Berkshire hill-country ! Shadows of mountain and forest lie for a moment upon greenest earth, and at the shifting of a cloud-screen vanish. At a lull in the west wind intense heat is exhaled upon the atmosphere ; the air of the pine woods smites the face like a blast from a furnace ; then a burst of invigorating wind comes to revive fainting humanity. In answer to it, the elm-trees toss and whisper to the pines ; the birches, white ladies of the woods, gossip with the tasseled chestnuts. The red bell-lilies in the oat-fields tinkle above a sea of rippled, glossy verdure. In the tall meadow-grasses, daisies, rudbeckias, vetch, and purple clover bend and intermingle. To greet the perfect day, nature sends forth all the incense in her caskets.

FOLLOWING a forest road under an awning formed of chestnuts, hemlocks, flowering linden, hickories, beech-boughs crusted with tiny nuts, and garlands of wild grape, jogged a basket-phaëton, leisurely driven by a girl, behind whom was perched a youthful groom in undress livery of cords. The continuity of dense shade



during a mile or two was grateful alike to the fat pony, to the lazy little groom, and to the graceful charioteer. Now listening to the liquid notes of the wood-robins, now plunging her eye into the bracken and maidenhair that grew in masses upon the roadside, or else stopping when the pony wished to dip his nose into a trough of ice-cold water fed by a moss-grown conduit from the hills above, the girl dawdled away a pleasant hour. When she came out of the lovely wood into a country road bordered with low stone walls overgrown by greenery, the view opened nobly before her. Hills upon hills, mountains beyond, a valley with a winding river, here and there a farm-house overtopped in size by its red barn, on the steep hillsides pastures with short herbage, scattered rocks, wild brier-roses, and sweet-fern, the odor of which was trodden out by the feet of grazing sheep and cattle. More daisies in white sheets, rumped by the breeze; more oat-fields, yellowish red with the lovely mottled bells that steal away their substance. A bit of New England, this—placid, verdant, soothing to eye and spirit. As good as old England, thought the looker-on, save for the lack of habitations blended by age with their surroundings. And far away, in a hollow to the left, below a slope of shining Indian corn, she saw the sparkle of a sapphire lake.

“Would that be Pocasset?” the lady asked of her attendant, extending her whip in the direction of this open eye of the landscape.

“Beg pard’n, miss, but I ’m sure I could n’t say,” answered the prim little buttony personage.

The absurdity of her appeal to this imported speci-



men struck the questioner, and she laughed aloud. A countryman in a checked shirt, and carrying a scythe, was met at this moment. As he stopped naïvely to enjoy the spectacle of her equipage, she repeated the inquiry.

"No, marm; it ain't," he said promptly. "To git to Pocasset, you 've got to turn into the next piece of woods to yer right. There 's a mighty sight of ponds hereabouts, an' all on 'em purty."

"Thank you," said she, feeling in a tiny purse of silver network at her girdle for a small coin to bestow upon him. To her confusion, he colored to the ears, and with a grunt of refusal of the dole, passed slouching on his way.

"I forget where I am," she said to herself, blushing also. "I hope I did not irremediably wound the feelings of that free-born republican. But I am sure he would not hesitate to drive a sharp bargain with me in the way of trade."

The pony, reminded by a flick of the whip, resumed his easy gait. The groom, deciding that there was as little exertion in this method of earning his wages as another, sprang to his perch. A mile farther, and the turn of the road appeared, leading into a wood of great pines, oaks, and towering hemlocks.

In the heart of these shadowy depths lay a pool of azure tint and considerable length and breadth. The road ended beside a bank sloping down to a sheet of water in a noble grove, cleared of undergrowth, and verdant with moss and bracken. So remote the spot, it was a genuine surprise to the lady of the chariot to espy near the edge of this pond a gipsy fire, over



which a kettle was boiling. Under the trees rugs were spread around a hamper suggestive of good fare. A few books had been left by their readers upon the rugs and roots of trees. At a little distance, a smart buck-board stood detached from horses tied at a rack; and directly from under the steep bank glided a punt filled with wild flowers, fishing-tackle, and people in holiday attire.

"What a surprise!" called a woman's voice. "We had no idea you had come up."

"Nor I that you were here."

So saying, Sybil Gwynne threw the reins to her groom, and springing from the phaëton, ran down the bank to greet her friends. She had known, of course, of the Granthams' residence in this neighborhood, but had not counted upon seeing them at this spot, or so soon.

"We came up yesterday," she added. "Etta has a headache from the heat; the men are all absorbed with the horses; and so I begged for this trap to explore the country-side."

"Then pray send the groom home with it, and stop with us for luncheon," said Mrs. Grantham, who, in her crisp shirt and skirt and shade-hat, looked young and summer-like.

The other voyagers were Mowbray Grantham, wearing the shocking old coat and trousers he called his "fishing-suit," with a straw hat purchased in the nearest village shop; one of his sons, in similar attire; Katty, a picture of jaunty prettiness; and Agatha Carnifex.

"I suppose if you did n't let Etta know your where-



abouts she would be alarmed," went on Katrina. "Do stay. We can just as well leave you there on our return."

The others chiming in, Sybil let herself be persuaded, and the little groom was accordingly dismissed.

"We were just coming ashore to prepare for luncheon," said Mrs. Grantham. "This is our own grove, and to spend the day here is one of our favorite hot-day performances. Lake Pocasset, although in the pine woods, is mysteriously cool. How nice it will be to sit under the trees and let you tell us rustics of your grand doings in the world beyond the sea!"

"We arrived in town day before yesterday," answered Sybil, "and followed Jack's fancy to come here from the steamer. I am to join my aunt at Newport at the end of the week. How pretty this is! What an odd greenish light! It is a nook of sweet repose after the glare of the open road. And how particularly nice," she added, turning to Agatha, "that I have found *you* with Mrs. Grantham!"

"It is nice to be here," answered Miss Carnifex. "Our life at Hillcote is delightful. Katty and her brothers and I form a band of lawless vagabonds, determined to get everything that outdoor life can give us, at any expense of looks."

"Now for work," said Mrs. Grantham, briskly. "We will lay the cloth first, and unpack the cold meat and salads. I shall trust no one with the coffee, and my husband will care for that wine-cellar of his in the hollow of a tree. I think, Jim," she said to her boy, "you may as well not attempt to broil our fish till you see whether the canoeists bring in something better."



"Mr. Davenant was lying on his back in the bottom, looking up into the sky," said Jim, with decision; "and Bob can't catch anything to save him. I vote to cook what fish we have, and not to depend upon those loafers."

"Mr. Davenant!" said the last comer.

"Yes; he is with us for a much-needed vacation," answered Katrina. "There, Jim, is a beautiful bed of hickory embers on the stones. Jim is an old woodsman, Miss Gwynne, as you will say when you taste his broiled bass. My boys had a camp here for a month one summer, and cooked for themselves all that we did not fetch them from home when we drove over to see whether they were dying of starvation."

Mowbray Grantham, who took his ease beside Sybil while the others worked, had leisure to observe the sudden vivid illumination of her beautiful fair face.

His wife's invitation to her to join them had not been seconded by him with much zeal. He had always looked upon Sybil Gwynne as a Parisian version of Undine. Now he detected in her expression something that lent to it human charm. In her simple morning frock of blue-and-white-striped cotton, with a sailor-hat of white straw, and a knot of sweet-peas in her white belt, she looked like a charming school-girl, glad yet shy. "After all," he reflected, "who shall say that a pretty woman is not a good thing to look at, anywhere?"

A canoe, propelled in leisurely fashion by Bob Grantham, and containing a recumbent figure in flannels with his hat over his eyes, now came in sight around the bank. A shout from Jim to his brother,



summoning him to help in cookery, aroused the loungee, who, pulling himself up, looked about him in contrition.

"Are we here?" he said. "Bob, you rascal, you betrayed me! I had no idea we were at the landing-place."

"Too hot for apologies—too hot for anything," quoth the recreant, steering the craft skilfully inshore.

Another moment, and Davenant stood in blank astonishment in Sybil's presence. The drowsy look, passing from his eyes, was succeeded by one of brilliant welcome. Whence she had come he asked not, but took her hand in his, and looked into her face as if he could never have enough of it; then, remembering the presence of outsiders,—although these were busy with hospitable cares,—stood back, and curbed his fervor.

Constraining himself to speak instead of shouting for joy, he asked her the usual questions about her arrival in the country, and told her, in return, that having himself come up the day before yesterday to be Mrs. Grantham's guest, for two days only, it was his wish to remain at Hillcote for a week.

"We shall be quite near you, then," said Sybil, artlessly. "Perhaps we'll be meeting every day."

Davenant, not trusting himself to discuss this contingency, now yielded to a call to luncheon, that, spread on a cloth upon the ground, afforded dainties perfected for such occasions by long experience. The broiled bass, so recently transferred from the "glassy, cool, translucent wave," were praised and enjoyed in a way to reward the two cooks for the heat of their



endeavor. The claret, the black coffee served afterward, all details, carefully sustained the general pitch of excellence.

When they had finished, Mr. Grantham retired to lounge upon a Highland plaid stretched over a bed of bracken, and there smoke his cigar, while Katty read aloud to him from a book of Rudyard Kipling's prose. Mrs. Grantham, retaining the faithful Jim as her aide-de-camp, dismissed the others—"anywhere," she said.

At this, Agatha Carnifex challenged Bob to return with her to a spot in the woods where from the boat she had seen a curious and superb bank of tawny fungi freckled with crimson spots.

"May I go, too?" asked Sybil.

"You will only soil that pretty gown," said Mrs. Grantham, practically; "it is all boggy where they are going. Take my advice: keep cool and clean. Get into the canoe, and let Mr. Davenant show you the bed of water-lilies at the end of the lake. All the rest of us have enjoyed it this morning, and you really should not miss the spectacle."

"Yes; do go," urged Agatha. "It is the finest flower-show you will have seen since Regent's Park."

Sybil still hesitated.

"Will you come?" asked Davenant, in a voice that reached her ear alone.

She yielded. Had anything forewarned Sybil that she would be placed in this situation, there might have been some holding back; but the unexpected had conquered her; it seemed all so natural.

When, on stepping into the canoe, she laid her bare



little white hand in his sunburnt one, Sybil felt what was coming toward her on swift wings of destiny. They paddled off, she sitting in the bow and facing him in speechless pleasure, until, at the extreme end of the lake, the canoe ran into a floating field of starry, snow-white blooms, golden at heart, exhaling richest fragrance, their chalices cradled upon broad, moist plaques of green.

Under the nearest bank grew rushes, tall and vigorous. The air, steeped in perfume and filled with the errant particles of summer growth, was also melodious with the song of wood-birds, and resonant with the hum of bright-winged circling insects. The symphony of midsummer was at its climax.

"Oh, let us stay here!" she cried involuntarily, and a flash of triumph leaped into his eyes.

While they lingered he shifted his place a little, at the other end of the canoe, to watch her more composedly. They laughed together like children at the rocking of their frail craft, and, once at rest again, began the babbling interchange of respective experience since they had parted, just as if no cloud of distrust had ever come between them. He explained to her how, his visit to Hillcote having been twice before interrupted by business calls, he had come very near missing this chance also—and then where would that have left him? How he had believed her to be stopping in the Engadine until the autumn; how nothing was further from his dreams than this surprise of her presence beneath an ancient pine-tree on the bank of Lake Pocasset; how, for him, life since he saw her last had gone on in the usual humdrum fashion; he had



worked, worked, worked,—as he expected always to have to do,—without other relaxations than those possible in a hot town when every one excepting toilers has gone to the country.

Sybil's eyes shone upon him with soft compassion. She tried to realize this existence of his, so unlike anything in her acquaintance with other men. She thought of the debonair idlers she had seen in London and Paris, and New York's great mill of workers without perspective seemed pitiless.

"But you have some diversions, surely?" she asked in a sad voice.

"Enough and to spare," he answered with a smile; "but not, probably, of the kind you would recognize as such."

"It sounded so dreary!" she exclaimed apologetically.

"Not dreary if one faces it with hope in his heart, and courage. And, you must remember, it is my life. Even before I met you I had my bright moments and rewards. Since then—"

Her eyes drooped before his. With one hand trailing in the water, she drew to her a long green stem crowned with the peerless blossom of New England lakes. Davenant went on:

"I don't like to tell you what a black time I passed through after I heard you were going to marry that man Cameron."

"But I am not!" she exclaimed with enchanting disregard of consequences. "I have no idea of doing so."

"You have come back to me heart-whole?"



"To—to America," she faltered, with an effort to recall her rash encouragement.

"To me—to *me!*" he cried passionately. "I 'm a tyro, I suppose, and my brain is in a tumult, and I am desperately anxious for you to love me as I love you—as I 've loved you ever since we met. But I don't want to ask you for yourself if you 're not ready to hear me. I 'd rather you 'd silence me now, and give me a chance hereafter. If you 'll give me that chance I 'll do *anything* to win you."

Sybil's mouth curved in a happy smile.

"Had you rather put it off?" she said, more mistress of herself than he was master of his palpitating speech.

MRS. GRANTHAM, who had packed her baskets and ordered her horses put to the buckboard, stood upon the bank, gathering her chickens beneath her wings.

"It feels and smells like a thunder-storm," she said. "I really think, Mowbray, you had better let one of the boys go in the punt and call those two to come back."

"The storm is probably a long way off, my dear," said her husband; "and no doubt Miss Gwynne and Davenant will be coming presently."

"If we are caught, mother, we can stop in that empty house behind the poplars on the main road," said Master Jim; "and there 's a shed for the trap and horses."

With a distant rumble of thunder, a little shiver in the branches of the wood began.

"You see, Mowbray! I insist that you go and call them, Jim," said Mrs. Grantham.



"They are there," said Miss Carnifex, calmly, as the missing ones came in sight.

The canoe, kept at the lake for his diversion by Mr. Grantham, was quickly deserted by its latest occupants and put under shelter. The party with hurrying footsteps climbed into the buckboard, and the horses trotted off. When they reached the ridge of the hill above the lake, the lightning had begun to play daz-  
zlingly, lacing the branches of the roadside trees.

"Faster, papa!" cried Katty, who, with one of her brothers, sat beside her father on the front seat. "I love this tearing along into an advancing storm. You'll surely get to the deserted house before the rain catches us."

All nature was in commotion. The tall grass and flowers of the wayside bent, and were bowed to earth. The surface of the fields of oats and corn showed deep dimples from the wind. A few drops fell. Thunder pealed again with a deep, glorious rumble, and again the lightning flashed, this time with a blue glare.

Sybil, sitting between Agatha and Davenant, shrank and trembled irrepressibly.

"You are not afraid?" said Davenant, inclining toward her tenderly.

Agatha, who had sat erect gazing toward the storm, seemed to have heard nothing; but the next livid flash from the heavily charged cloud, that, as they drove under the shed of the deserted house, struck one of the row of poplars before it, showed Davenant the expression of her face.

When, a deluge of rain over, the sun shone out into the warm, humid air, they resumed their drive.



"This is a true New England frolic of Dame Nature," said Mr. Grantham. "I wonder which was the most frightened of our party?"

"Not I," said Katty. "Mama was a little, for I saw her clutch Jim's coat-sleeve, and Miss Gwynne looked rather white."

"So did Miss Carnifex," said Jim Grantham. "I think she's the whitest still."

"James!" said his mother, reprovingly; "never make personal remarks."

DURING the rest of his holiday Davenant walked upon air. Thanks to the isolation of the two houses in a quiet neighborhood, daily opportunity was afforded him to see his beloved, and sun himself in the radiance of her smiles. The necessity enjoined upon him by her of keeping their affair to themselves until she could announce it formally to her Aunt Lewiston lent the charm of mystery and device to their meetings. In the glorification of his spirits, he took the trouble to be extremely polite to Etta Stanley, who, to please her husband, had come into this barren district, but was longing to leave it for Newport. Mrs. Stanley, revoking her earlier decision, now announced that Davenant had a great deal in him. She was prepared to launch with him upon one of her shadowy flirtations, wherein the man had little to do besides following her in public and appearing to be devoted. But to this Davenant did not respond; and, luckily for him, a friend of her husband's, a connoisseur in horse-flesh, whose wife lived in permanence abroad, came up just then to stop for a week at Stanley Hall. This gentle-



man, well understanding how to dawdle unemotionally after his hostess, and save her from having to go about with Jack, relieved the situation for Davenant.

Mrs. Grantham, as we have seen, the most good-natured of souls, was disconcerted by the new arrangement. She admired Sybil, but loved Agatha; and on the day following the luncheon at Lake Pocasset, Agatha had terminated her visit, and gone to keep her father company at their own summer home in New Jersey, near Morristown. After her departure it was evident to the casual observer that Davenant could never really have cared otherwise than as a friend for the admirable Miss Carnifex. He was too cheerful, too emphatic in indorsing praises of her, too calm in her absence, too—everything but what Katrina had intended him to be. And at the end of the second day after the encounter with Sybil the keen-sighted Katty told her mother that she thought, and Jim thought, “anybody with half an eye” could see that Mr. Davenant was “dead gone” upon Miss Gwynne. Katrina, struggling with vexed unbelief, had to succumb when Jim told her he had seen the couple out in the huckleberry pasture, sitting upon a boulder, and looking at the sunset, hand in hand.

“That’s not all, mother,” added the boy, with deeper excitement, his cherub cheeks ruddy, his eyes distended, as he whispered something in her ear.

“James Grantham!” began his mother, then stopped short. So much for her idyl of Hillcote, wherein Davenant and her favorite Agatha were to have played the leading parts!



THUS Davenant entered upon the kingdom of his hopes. In the fullness of his satisfaction there was no alloy. This great prize of life that had come to him seemed, like the lesser ones preceding it, his due. He was proud, exultant, in feeling that his manhood was about to be made complete.



## VIII



OLSTOI has said that a newly married man is like one who, having been charmed with the graceful and joyous motion of a boat upon the sea, afterward embarks in it. He then feels the difference between contemplation and action. It is not enough for him to sit still and avoid rocking the boat; he must keep on the lookout, be accurate in following the course, mindful of wind and weather, and is himself obliged to propel the heavy oars.

Nothing of this had as yet suggested itself to Peter Davenant as, on their honeymoon journey, he sailed with Sybil out of the Bosphorus for a cruise in the *Ægean*.

The violent opposition of Mrs. Lewiston to their engagement, which, accepting no compromise, required Sybil to break with him or forfeit the shelter of her home, had precipitated matters. After a stormy week at her aunt's house in Newport, the girl had yielded to his solicitation to be married quietly in church there, and go abroad until her aunt's excitement should in some degree subside. In this decision she was seconded by her cousin St. Clair, who, attending her at



the altar, not only gave her away in marriage, but presented the bride with a couple of strings of pearls more befitting a princess of the blood than the undowered wife of a hard-working lawyer. Others of Sybil's friends who would have liked to be present were debarred by the hasty nature of the proceedings. Agatha Carnifex, the Granthams, and Ainslie sent gifts and good wishes. The affair, a nine days' wonder of the newspapers, was in time superseded by another "social incident" offering opportunity for more flamboyant head-lines.

QUICKLY wooed, quickly wed, Sybil was like the creature of a dream. Not an acquaintance of her aunt's and Mrs. Stanley's way of thinking had regarded her action as other than the result of impassioned folly. People who knew better commended her for courage and independence in asserting, at two-and-twenty, her right to the husband of her heart. Croakers said this was the "fine, enlightened stride" of new womanhood. And, lastly, those familiar with Mrs. Lewiston's temper when aroused by opposition averred that Sybil, poor creature, had really nowhere else to turn.

The next most serious difficulty in their path had been Davenant's adjustment of his affairs to take her away for a couple of months from the annoyances of home. When, this finally accomplished, the world was all before them where to choose, a memory of their first talk decided both upon a voyage in the Levant.

From Paris they had taken the Orient Express to Constantinople, and finding it still too hot to do more than skim through the sights of that brilliant, dirty



town, had there boarded a Russian steamer bound for Smyrna and Alexandria, but intending to bring up *en route* at the Piræus.

It was a mellow day of autumn when their big, well-fitted modern vessel broke away from the throng of little rowboats, caiques, and launches besetting her sides as long as she lay at anchor in the channel, and up to the last minute embarking passengers and mails. The numbers and colors of these crafts recalled to Sybil the course at Henley regatta between the races. Deafened by the shouts of boatmen and stevedores, amused by the water pageant, our pair of travelers hung over the rail like two children, taking note of all they saw. A last impatient whistle had hurried up the gangway steps the family of a Turkish general, whose staff, on taking leave of him to return to their launch, were kissed in a patriarchal fashion while bending at his knee. His chief wife, a formless figure in a dark-green-silk night-gown, with a veil of striped yellow gauze, white-cotton stockings, and slippers without heels, presently established herself on deck, where, after straightening the tassel of her husband's fez, she proceeded to eat sweetmeats held up in a silver box by a squatting, amber-tinted slave-girl with white draperies and eyes like a faithful dog's.

Two little servant-girls in pink cotton, with veils of white cheese-cloth, ran hither and thither, carrying silver cups of water, and holding boxes of cigarettes, in readiness for their mistress's call. The mother-in-law, a sallow old woman dressed in black, with bright eyes and a jolly laugh, took her seat behind the cruncher of many sweets; while the son and heir, a



small boy in green-velvet jacket and knickerbockers, with a fez over his droll little foxy face, wandered incessantly, after the manner of his kind, in custody of a Turkish tutor visibly alarmed by the vagaries of so important a charge. High-class Armenians; families returning from a summer at Therapia to their homes in Egypt—among them a brown mother with a flock of little daughters like brown birds; an English couple; a German professor and his wife; a bride from Odessa with her Greek husband (this officer wearing, despite the sultry atmosphere, his full-dress uniform and tufted hat, and spurs); a dark-eyed belle from Syria, dressed like a French fashion-plate, on the return with her papa and mama from the Turkish Newport; a coquettish young Rumanian lady guarded by her white-haired Parisian husband; more Turks, who kept aloof; some Alexandrian citizens; and a group of handsome Russian officers, made up the ship's tale of first-cabin passengers.

The lower forward deck of the steamer was even fuller of cosmopolitan variety. Our Americans, up above, surveyed the scene with eager interest. Before the ship left the Bosphorus this space had been converted into a focus of Oriental color and animation. Lounging on mattresses covered with many-hued stuffs and rugs, a veiled harem occupied the center. About it were seen Turks at ease; Greek and Armenian peddlers; Arab women and babies; a band of sturdy Montenegrins, with shepherd coats of the natural tint of wool, leggings, and small caps embroidered on the crown, their belts stuck with knives and pistols; Circassians in sheepskin *shubas*; sad-eyed Ar-



menian merchants in long black robes and crimson fezzes; a solitary muzhik in black velveteens, with a scarlet shirt and sash; and two Russian pilgrims to Jerusalem, with scrips and staffs and cross-gartered legs, lying asleep upon the boards, their red beards turned upward to the sky.

The luggage of these travelers was as picturesque as its owners—bales, saddle-bags, carpet-sacks, and cushions of variegated hues and rich texture; grass-woven baskets heaped with grapes and peaches; melons hugged under the arm; water-bottles, jugs and trays of pottery and beaten brass; a medley of gleaming metal, embroidered stuffs, and sheenful silk. So delighted was Sybil with each new type, costume, or grouping that, her eye detached from its surroundings, Davenant could with difficulty induce her to come away with him to pace the length of the deck, and look back at the marvelous beauty of the vanishing city.

Melting in the effulgent sunshine of an unclouded heaven, they saw vanish towers, minarets, mosques, palaces of pink-and-white fretwork, terraced gardens, cypress-groves, ancient crenelated walls dipping into the water, and the towering domes of St. Sophia. As they steamed out of the Bosphorus a bird winging its way across the water, which at times it touched, attracted Sybil's attention.

"That petrel of the Bosphorus," said, in good English, the German professor, who stood near them with his wife, "is almost the most restless fellow extant. The Turks give him the poetical name of 'the lost soul'; but my wife and I have bestowed a better title: we call him 'the American *en voyage*.'"



"My dear!" said the lady, blushing, and touching her husband's coat-sleeve.

"Oh! Ah! I beg your pardon," said he, penitently. "Of course I supposed you to be English. I should *never* have taken you for Americans, you know," he ended radiantly.

"Worse and worse!" whispered Sybil, as the two couples parted to resume their march. "Don't let that eloquent face of yours show you mind it. If you were as old a traveler as I am, you'd be accustomed to that pleasantry."

"I can be vexed with no one in such a scene," he said, laughing. "Henceforward every inch of our way is through the classics. I must begin to furbish up my memories. There are two questions I forbid you to ask me: where Homer was born, and where was ancient Troy."

"Just what I meant to do!" she said. "If you don't tell me all you know, or don't know, I shall be obliged to appeal to our friend the professor, who, I can see, is giving *his* wife a flood of information."

"I'll swear I won't be forced into the dragoman business! But I'll tell you this: there was once a German youngster in a wine-shop who, after listening to the talk of some students about the Iliad, made up his mind that he would like some day to journey the way we are going now. In after years, when he had amassed gold and learning, he came to the Hellespont—"

"That we shall pass at two in the morning!" cried she, in a vexed tone.

"—and, taking up his abode at Hissarlik, dug and



dug till he had uncovered seven Troys. Out of that collection you may take your choice of the real one."

"Don't be provoking! Be sure I sha'n't ask you any more questions. Let us agree to see it all now, and read about it when we go home."

"It occurs to me, incidentally, that must be Mount Ida," said he, pointing over at the rosy snow of a summit rising beyond the brown hills of the Asian coast. "But never mind what it is, so long as we 're here together, far from the world, sailing, sailing to the south. Sybil, I did not think there could be such happiness."

"Nor I. I have only one regret—that this time a year ago we had never even met."

"A bagatelle!" he exclaimed, his voice thrilling joyfully. "Why, we were traveling to meet each other then!"

AND now, the splendor of sunlight waning with the day's decline, a violet mist gathered in the hollows of the Asian highlands. Along the western horizon the blue was lost in gold. A fresher breeze arose, lashing the surface of Marmora into lively billows, over which the deep-laden ship passed on a steady keel. As the sun forsook them, a long, wailing cry arose:

*"Allah Akbar! To your knees!"*

It was a muezzin, who, stationing himself upon the bridge over the forward deck, reminded the faithful of the hour of prayer. Scattered about the vessel, the Mussulmans, everywhere kneeling upon little carpets, prostrated themselves toward Mecca.

Sybil rebelled against the call to dinner in the saloon.



"This is too beautiful to leave," she said, holding back.

A stout Frenchwoman, with mustachios, and carrying a pet dog under her arm, passing the couple at this moment, smiled at them benignantly.

"*Oh la jeunesse!*" she murmured with a rich sigh. "One of these days, madame, you too will be hungry for your dinner."

"Horrid thing!" said the girl, petulantly, when the French lady had gone on.

"I'm afraid I am hungry now—awfully so," said Peter, guiltily.

"Then for your sake I'll go in. But we are to sit up on deck to enter the Dardanelles. I could n't bear to miss the Hellespont."

Their evening meal, served at the captain's table, had apparently been gathered by the steward from all ports of the vessel's route: fish and mutton from Constantinople; partridges from the Piræus; *kalatchi* (the white rolls of Russia) and fowls from Odessa; sweets from Syra; wines, red and white, from Bessarabia; fruits, nuts, and resined white wine from the Levant in general; and, to conclude, Lilliputian cups of Turkish coffee, turbid with grounds and yielding rich aroma.

"That was a pleasant little company," said Sybil, afterward. "How they all lent themselves to good-fellowship! Imagine a lot of our countrymen, under like circumstances, loitering at table for the sake of merry chat!"

"Other countries, other conditions," said her husband.



"You did not like my saying that, Peter. I see I must never find fault with the land of the eagle and the scream."

"Perhaps I don't want your thoughts to shape themselves that way, because, when we go back—"

"Don't—don't speak of going back!" cried she. "I want nothing to shadow this lovely, blessed voyage."

"There should be no shadows about our thoughts of home, my darling," he answered bravely, but at heart a trifle hurt.

They strolled forward again to look down into the third-class deck. Under the electric light in the rigging, the groups, who had for the most part already disposed themselves to slumber, presented a new medley of picturesque attitudes. One of the women of the harem, a slender girl, had thrown her bare brown arms, covered with silver bracelets, above her veiled head. The old crone who guarded them was mixing coffee for a big bearded Turk sitting on a cushion, drawing at his narghile in its gold-embossed glass vessel. Amid a cluster of bag-trousered Mussulmans, whose hands, held behind them, forever toyed with strings of wooden or amber beads, stood a dashing figure, smoking a cigarette, dressed in the costume of a cavass (the Turkish soldier serving as guard at the embassies). His jacket, thickly wrought with gold, his full trousers of crimson silk tucked into long, wrinkled boots, the embroidered holsters of his pistols, and the mustachios curling about a hardy, handsome face, lent him an air both gay and martial.

"He was but recently a famous Montenegrin rob-



ber," explained one of the ship's officers standing near the Americans. "They are quite in demand as servants at the embassies."

With their chairs in a quiet corner, Davenant and Sybil sat upon deck until, about midnight, the pharos of Gallipolis came in sight. As they approached it, Sybil, running forward, stood under the shelter of the captain's bridge to peer out into the darkness. Above her towered the mast, which, with its yard, both black in the shadow of an electric beacon, formed the image of a giant cross. In the rigging, outlined against the blue vault of the sky, millions of stars seemed tangled. Save for the silent specter of a Russian sailor gliding here and there, Sybil had the night to herself and her beloved. With Peter's arms around her, her head leaning against his breast, life overflowed for her with love and peace and hope.

ON deck again for a long, bright day in the *Ægean*! Leaving the Dardanelles (where, at the Hellespont, a health-officer in a small boat had stopped the ship for a brief parley), they skirted Lemnos,—between the twin summits of which was cradled Vulcan's forge,—then Tenedos, and after that ran for hours between the mainland and Mitylene, ancient Lesbos, burning Sappho's isle. Lesbian wine might have been circling in their veins, Lesbian sparrows twittering in their ears, so gay the mood of our voyagers. Following the line of serrated coast beneath summits of riven gray, the flanks of its lower hills clothed with olive-orchards and vineyards, they came at noon upon the chief town of the island, the walls of the ruined fortress of which,



built high and dry by Venetian masters of medieval days, were now washed by the encroaching waves.

Thenceforward the scene was like the shifting of a kaleidoscope. Rock-piles, arising from the turquoise sea, assumed forever changing forms and tints. Bastions of Russian porphyry, jagged cliffs of amethyst, crenelated walls of lapis lazuli, a row of golden organ-pipes, a cone of crystal, a tawny lion couchant, far-away castles of pale, cerulean blue! Along the shores of Asia Minor, the hills, with vegetation parched by the summer suns, were russet brown, bronze, and purple; the villages, with their occasional olive-mills, were built in eyries to which roads like pencil-strokes went up. Over all this, resplendent sunshine, a luminous radiance of atmosphere that has kept in it the magic of ancient days, and from the water a light breeze, like the touch of a cool hand!

"It is better than any book ever drilled into my boyish brain in a dead language," said Davenant. "I feel steeped in Southern color. And to have it with you beside me—"

Sybil did not weary of such a chorus to every one of her lover's songs of praise of his surroundings. She saw that he had indeed touched the meridian of satisfaction with created things. It checked upon her lips many a woman's question and speculation about their future plans and mode of life. It was agreed between them to put off all these considerations until the return voyage to America, which they expected to make from Naples when they could no longer stay abroad.

Sybil had never looked more lovely. Her fair, delicate face, with the forget-me-not blue eyes and wild-



rose bloom, had captivated most of her fellow-travelers, who had always a word, a smile, or a courteous act for the young bride. To-day, when the vessel rounded into the sparkling Gulf of Smyrna, people kept emerging from their cabins in resplendent toilets that put Mrs. Davenant's plain blue serge and straw sailor-hat in the shade. The fat French lady with the spaniel rustled by her in a fine confection of dress-maker's art, topped by a hat with nodding lilacs and white osprey plumes. A little dark gentleman from Egypt, whom the night before Sybil had mistaken for a waiter, appeared in high-heeled lacquered boots, pearl-colored trousers and hat, a frock-coat, blue scarf, yellow kid gloves, and a stick.

"They look askance at us," whispered Sybil. "We are not dressed for the occasion of landing in a fashionable port. And I, who thought Smyrna was all figs, and brigands, and the finest camels in Asia! Look, Peter! Here comes my rival, the other bride, in rose muslin, with *such* a gorgeous hat! I must run and change before we come to anchor. Peter dear, would you wear your white duck or the striped blue-and-white cotton I had on that day at Pocasset?"

"The white duck," said Peter, judicially. "Keep the blue-and-white till we get home and I can have a glass case made for it."

"How long ago it seems,—that day at Pocasset,—and how far away Pocasset is!" she said dreamily, her eyes fixed on a line of white glistening salt-heaps edging an island coast. "I am afraid we were in a dreadful hurry."



"We shall have the rest of our lives to repent our rash action in," said he, rallying her.

"Repent! When I have you! Only sometimes I think how very much we are alone in the world. Oh, Peter, you must be so good to me—and I to you!"

Her April moods always charmed him, but to-day she had struck a deeper note. He almost felt that for the first time she realized the nature of their bond. While he knew she could not exhaust the depth and breadth of his enveloping love, he wondered if she were equally certain of herself. So far, she had been his queen enthroned in a fond heart. By and by, when she should come to step down from the bridal pedestal and work with him side by side—

"Do you know," she interrupted his meditation, "I think it is so much nicer traveling without a maid and courier. Some girls could n't get on at all; but I—I have always done my own hair and known how to keep my things in order. I could not endure to have my clothes disorderly or not fresh and crisp."

"That I am sure of," he said, looking at her with approving eyes. At the same time another one of those shafts of apprehension struck him. Did Sybil understand what it meant not to have all her surroundings meet her dainty taste?

"I am afraid," he ventured, "it will be long before I can supply you with a maid and courier, or with journeys that would require them. Our travels must be around the hearth-rug for some time. But you have had so much, your mind will always be filled with lovely pictures."

"Don't speak of anything but this!" she exclaimed



lightly; and again the pagan spirit of her creed—to enjoy the hour, and let the future go—took hold of him regretfully.

SYBIL selected from among the gay little fleet that came out to wait upon the ship the boat having the prettiest rug in it.

When they reached the projecting quay, where a young Turk waited to visé passports, the two were distracted by the din of solicitations from a crowd of guides. Whether to go to Ephesus or the moon, Sybil could not decide, and ended by declaring she preferred to stroll about the town.

“But if I’ve got to take one of these bores, I’d rather go back to the ship,” she said petulantly.

A nice young man in a blue-serge suit—evidently a suave citizen willing to be of service to tormented foreigners—here interposed politely.

“Madam has only to pass these rude fellows by,” he said in English, “and to walk on, paying no attention.”

Across the blinding sunshine of the quay they hurried, diving into a cool back street paved with large flagstones newly watered, its shade-trees resting their branches on the house-roofs. A glimpse into a courtyard revealed pepper-trees mingling their feathery foliage with the rosy blooms of oleander. And then from a narrow lane emerged a train of stately camels, swaying their long gray necks in the wake of a small, belled donkey.

“Let us follow the camels,” exclaimed Sybil, gleefully, “no matter where they lead us!”



But she had reckoned without her host. There, at her elbow, stood the nice young citizen, lifting his hat.

"Mister wishes to conduct madam to view the bazaar firstly?" he said. "I am serving many distinguished English in the capacity of guide—"

"We have no need of you," said Davenant, briefly, turning upon his heel.

They thought to shake him by entering the Hotel Huck for a lemonade and a glance at the "Levant Herald." When they emerged, he was awaiting them, affable and merciless. He infested the honeycomb passages of the bazaar, appeared in front of the mosque, refused to be lost in the medley of Oriental peoples overflowing, with cries about nothing, the noisy little Turkish town. Upon their taking refuge in a book-shop to purchase the Iliad and the Odyssey in modern Greek, the Pest framed himself in the doorway, still insufferably smiling.

"I come out to ship to-morrow morning—eh?—to conduct mister and madam to view a fig-factory?" he said inquiringly.

"Fig-factory be hanged!" shouted Davenant, at the end of his patience. "If you speak to me again I'll knock you down!"

At evening the hotels, cafés chantants, and theaters were brilliantly alight. The long quay was a parterre of colored lamps. Fainter gleams, like fireflies, twinkled in the old houses scattered about the misty heights beneath the ruined acropolis crowning Mount Pagus. Music and laughter came floating from shore to ship. The Italian gunboat at anchor in the harbor



threw out sheaves of colored fire that broke in showers of stars, repeated in the water. The pale sickle of the moon, hiding her diminished head behind the peaks of Two Brothers, vanished from the scene.

The lovers, who had the deck almost to themselves, sat there, as usual, till late into the night.

AWAY again on the morrow, sailing ever over a sea now green, now blue, now streaked with rose, past islands of amethystine hue—the purple of Scotch heather drenched in sunshine. All day they skirted the mainland, here a line of tawny foot-hills, in strange shapes, like lions and tigers couched together, under summits, gray, wrinkled, ancient, resembling mastodons in stone, the feet of these high-piled monsters lost in one continuous garland of olive and orange, grape and fig, almond and laurel.

At six in the evening the ship came again to anchor, facing Chios, the scene of Homer's school of poetry. The town of the blind bard has been swept out of sight by time and earthquake. At the foot of volcanic peaks, like cones of gunpowder, clusters confidingly the new town, built in tinted plaster, gay, cheerful, and overflowing with the riotous animation of the Levant. Only an old-time fortress near the sea tells the tale of by-gones the classic traveler demands.

There was to be no landing at pretty, lively Chios.

When the great Russian came to a halt in their bay, a line of small boats shot out to meet her with the intrepid dash of a boarding-party of Indian canoes.

"We shall soon be in Bedlam," said Davenant. "These Chians are the worst of the turbulent Levan-



tines for racket. It must always have been a noisy place. If I don't forget, Homer was nearly frightened away from here by the barking of Glaucus's dog."

In a few moments the water about the vessel was swarming with small craft. The passenger-boats, spread with brilliant rugs, were crowded with people and luggage of many colors; the freight-boats piled with hampers of grapes, figs, and nuts, sacks of raw mastic, and long-necked wicker bottles of mastic wine. The boatmen, manœuvering them over rough waves, eager each to get in ahead of the other at the end of the gangway, stood brandishing oars and boat-hooks, shouting, yelling, plunging, fiercely quarreling up and down the ranks. They were handsome fellows, as active as cats, dark-skinned, bare-legged, bare-armed, with gleaming teeth and eyes, merry in spite of furious raging at their mates. The trim Russian sailor stationed at the foot of the ship's ladder had to struggle for his life to keep them from hurling their passengers past him upon the steps. One persistent devil was brought to terms only by a blow that landed him on his back in the middle of his boat. All through the evening the hurly-burly raged, till at a late hour the ship got under way.

"Too bad we must leave this steamer," said Sybil, sighing. "It has all been perfect, wonderful! Such weather! Such a sea! When we are rich, Peter, we shall come here and dawdle for weeks in a yacht. But never do I expect to find again a ship so comfortable as this. What would Lord Byron have said to marble bath-tubs, with the water of the *Ægean* turned in through silver-plated faucets? We shall find out the



difference when we get into one of the Italian boats to go through the Gulf of Corinth."

"People who have put off travel as I've done get the benefit of *fin-de-siècle* comforts," said her husband. "I can't believe that to-morrow morning I'm to see Hymettus and Pentelikon and the Parthenon from this deck. Sybil, shall I tell you that my only fear in reaching Athens is that we'll meet somebody we've seen before?"

"And letters! Nobody knows how I dread that visit to the banker's and the post. Oh, these happy people on board who have no Newport gossiping about them, no New York newspapers paragraphing them—"

"My wife shall drop out of the newspapers," said he, fondly; "and in the world of our love Newport will make no difference."

"Peter dear, I've been wondering. Are we to get a house at once? Because I know of one on Park Avenue—the Monty Wutherings had it last year for six months. I'm sure the owner will let it from Christmas till May, and we should n't want to be much in town till Christmas."

"My dear little girl," he said patiently, "we must 'be in town' as soon as we get back; and, what's more, we must stay there. And I'm dreadfully afraid a house the Monty Wutherings would take is far above our purse."

Sybil's blue eyes opened a little wonderingly.

"Oh, but I assure you, darling, it's such a tiny house it could n't be dear if it tried."

"Do you chance to know the rent?"

"No one ever spoke of that to me. Oh, Peter, is n't



it ridiculous to be bothering about rent here, and on such an evening as this? Look at the moon over the mountains in that clear saffron sky, and the far lights of Chios! Our last night on the Ægean! Say some verses for me, please."

"Let us live, my Lesbia, —  
Let us our love enjoy.  
Out upon old men's frowns,  
Count them not worth a toy.  
The sun may rise again  
When once the night is past,  
When our brief light is gone—"

"I will hear no more," she protested. "It begins to sound melancholy—"

"Catullus ends it cheerfully enough," said he, laughing.

"I am tired of poetry; let us walk," she insisted, slipping her hand within his arm.



## IX



THE crown of their voyage was to be the ring of mountains lying in purple shadow about Athens and the Acropolis. Davenant, glass in hand, had been on deck since sunrise, gazing eagerly at the various points of the Grecian islands, identifying Minerva's temple as they passed it, and at last recognizing with a thrill those mighty piles of marble, Hymettus and Pentelikon, between which arises, upon its umber hill, that gem of the dead as of the living world, the Parthenon.

Sybil had stopped in the saloon for a cup of tea before she joined him. When they steamed into the Piræus the rapt gazer felt her light touch on his arm.

"I wonder how I ever pretended to enjoy anything before you were there to share it," he remarked. "The morning has felt incomplete without you; and in other days I wanted to be alone when I was sight-seeing."

"I also will own that this is just a little better than traveling with my aunt," said she, mischievously.

While they stood surveying the approach to the Athenian seaport, amid the crowd of vessels of many nationalities lying along the quays, a conspicuous



object was a beautiful yacht painted white, with the Stars and Stripes flying at her masthead.

Instantly Davenant's cap was lifted from his head, and a look of proud and reverent affection came into his eyes.

"What is it?" asked she, curiously. "Oh, only an American yacht! I can't imagine being glad to see that; for most likely there 'll be some compatriots at the hotel who 'll find us out, and there 's the end of our lovely isolation from the world."

"A man would be a poor creature, in my opinion, who would n't feel a thrill at the sight of his country's flag in a foreign harbor," he answered.

"I never thought of that side of it. Perhaps I have seen too many of them," she said, a little chilled by the suggestion of reproof. "At any rate, I shall ask this Cook's boatman, just coming up the side, who the owner is. They know everything about the docks."

"The *Almée*, belonging to Monsieur Willoughby of New York," was the reply Sybil conveyed to her husband, who had not left his stand. "Just as I supposed. Those Willoughbys! who own a boat because it's the fashion, and are both so dreadfully seasick I wonder they 've the courage to go outside of harbor."

"The yacht is a beauty, though," said he, admiringly. "Ah, there begins again that Southern clack and tumult of boatmen. But nothing will ever equal Chios!"

In their hotel, in rooms with long windows opening into a portico of snow-white marble, its pillars framing in full view the hill of his lifelong dreams, Dave-



nant left his wife to rest, while he set out on foot to scale the classic heights. What he felt and thought on the staircase of the Propylæa and on the step of the great temple, where he stood for a long time drinking in the scene and air and influence, must be imagined by those who share his sentiment.

At the portal of the exquisite little temple of Nike Apteros his visions were rudely disturbed by the approach of a large, bland personage in a too correct yachting-suit, who fell upon him with fervor, extending his hand.

"My dear sir, I'm charmed to see you here—charmed. Met you at dinner at the Granthams', and am well acquainted with your high reputation at our bar. My name is—"

"Of course—Mr. Willoughby," said Davenant, gathering his scattered wits together. "We were told that is your pretty yacht in harbor."

"Yes; I bought the *Almée* last year from Monty Wuthering, who had got tired of her. Fine boat, is n't she? Sent her over to the Mediterranean, and joined her at Gibraltar last month. M' wife had so much care and anxiety last winter, getting into our new house—"

"I—ah—remember," hastily interposed Davenant.

"—that the doctors said she could n't undertake the care of it this winter. On the verge of nervous prostration was Mrs. Willoughby. So we made up a little party for this cruise in the Mediterranean and Ionian. Came through the Canal of Corinth, or, I might say, scraped through,—m' wife quite hysterical over the narrow passage,—and expect to winter in Egypt."



"Do you stay long in Athens?" asked his hearer, wearily.

"Just as long as m' wife can be contented here. By George! Davenant, we 're at the best hotel I ever struck in a foreign country. I 'd be willing to put in a good stop here myself. But tell me of Mrs. Davenant. Of course you are on your wedding-tour. The world knows very well about your movements. Can't carry off a belle of society without suffering the penalty of having it discussed. Like to have a copy of the 'New York Interviewer,' giving a full account of your wedding? Think m' wife has one at the hotel."

"You will excuse me," said Davenant, stiffly.

"No offense meant. Everybody has his turn in the newspapers, and everybody knows what old lady Lewiston is when her back 's up. You 'll be interested to hear that m' wife 's secured for our expedition the one all the society columns are saying will succeed your fair lady as the beauty of the smart set—Miss Claribel Hilton. Heard of her, no doubt? Pretty as a peach. Mrs. Stanley tried to get her for Lenox before we left; but m' wife was too clever—whipped in with an invitation for this cruise. Some good fellows are of our party—several friends of your wife's—Allen, Willy Lang, and Beau Frisbie. Tried for Cleve, but he was in England visiting, and I could n't catch him."

Davenant, writhing with impatience, was yet struck by the names mentioned. He knew them to belong to people of Sybil's acquaintance, hitherto unapproachable by the lavish Willoughbys. The idea of this downpouring of idle pleasure-seekers upon the precious hours of his waning honeymoon sent disgust into



his heart. But stronger than all other feelings was for the moment his desire to be rid of a Willoughby in the shadow of the Parthenon.

It was inevitable that the Davenants should run into the other camp. After luncheon in their sitting-room, Davenant carried his wife off for a round of mild sight-seeing. He had found time during the morning to drop into the museum of the Acropolis and admire the recently discovered "Winged Three," with its serpent's tail, and now went back to give her a glimpse at it.

"Think of this splendid monster swooping down through ether every evening to gather tidings of what threatened Athens from the outer world, and returning to the Parthenon with the rising of the sun!"

"What strikes me in their sculpture," said Sybil, "is the grand, free forms of the women. If we could all be molded and hold ourselves erect like these statues and fragments, we'd be fit to 'take the lead.' Did you see the small size of that pretty Greek girl's waist who got into her carriage before ours at the hotel? I am sure she cannot draw a long breath comfortably."

"Ah, Mrs. Davenant!" said a voice. A good-looking man in light tweeds, who was surveying a frieze in rather bored fashion, had turned and was saluting them. It was Sybil's old acquaintance, familiar to the wealthy leisure circles of New York as Willy Lang, who took the circumstance of meeting them in Athens as he would have taken a similar encounter in Hyde Park or Fifth Avenue—or, for the matter of that, Djibouti.



"Rather a poor season to be here, but we 're well enough at the hotel," he said indifferently.

Lang, an old admirer of Sybil's, was well informed as to the romantic marriage excluding her from her aunt's good graces and bank-account. He admired her still, but wondered why Davenant had been such an ass as to take a bride under such circumstances, especially when everybody said that the fellow was getting ahead in the world like wild-fire. Nothing could have induced Lang to share *his* modest income with a wife. It was all he could do to knock about, buy drinks and cigars, clothe himself like a lily of the field, and pay club dues. The rest of his enjoyments came out of the purses of other people, to whom he gave the equivalent of his good looks, fine figure, and knowledge of the world, intending to do so until such time as it should please his fancy to secure a wealthy wife.

When Sybil introduced him with graceful pride to her husband, Lang treated Davenant with some show of civility. His shrewd, lazy remarks reminded Davenant of Ainslie, whom he had always liked, though in Ainslie there was the spark of individuality lacking in the present specimen. Keeping pace with them in the round of the museum, he stood lifting his hat at the carriage-step, outside, after Sybil had taken her seat in it to depart.

Davenant could see that Sybil was rather gratified than otherwise by this meeting. With Lang she had plunged at once into a talk concerning people and things Davenant had already tried, for his wife's sake, to care about, but tried in vain. He was generously



glad for her to have this pleasure, and at the same time a very little piqued at her animation in partaking of it.

"You like Lang, then?" he said as they drove off.

"I like some of the things he likes, rather," answered she, with a mutinous smile. "My dearest Peter, you can't expect me all at once to live on your mountain-tops and never go down into the valleys. Now, tell me candidly, what do you think of Willy Lang?"

"I'm afraid I sha'n't think of him after we've been parted for five minutes, though he's pleasant-enough company. The worst I have against him is that he is willing to be the guest of the Willoughbys."

"Who caused you to thrill with their American flag, remember!"

"I wish they had remained invisible beneath it. Sybil, I foresee endless vexations through these people being here. It is almost cause for moving."

"The hotel is so large. We can have our meals always to ourselves. In the evenings sometimes it might be fun to—oh, no, no! what am I saying? I am not Sybil Gwynne, and do not belong to that set now. I am Mrs. Davenant, an entirely reconstructed young person, who glories in her handsome, clever husband, and would n't change him for all that these people stand for. Indeed, Peter, I'm in earnest. And if I ever seem to you weak in these matters, think of what my whole life has been, put in the balance with the few months since you appeared to influence me for better things. I don't envy Claribel Hilton in the least, stepping into my old shoes. She's quite welcome



to them. I thought Etta would take her up when I deserted. Etta must have a girl friend. But she 'll need a long time to get over Claribel's traveling under Mrs. Willoughby's wing. There 's been a rumor that Claribel is in love with Willy Lang, and perhaps that accounts for her being here. But he does n't even look at her. She 's not rich enough. Any one who gets him must contribute millions and a house. Those other men we 're going to meet are of Lang's sort, only not as nice. You 'll see them all over Europe, amusing themselves. They 're rather ashamed than otherwise of being called Americans. They don't like being mixed up with our vulgar herd that travels; though, to tell the truth, Peter, I don't either."

"Yet we shall soon be hand in glove with Mrs. Willoughby."

"Oh, the Willoughbys have crept 'in.' They are bad, certainly, but no worse than the parvenus of every nation that rise to the top by spending money for other people's entertainment. It is a sure sign the Willoughbys are 'in' that Willy Lang consents to come on a cruise with them."

"I am sick of their 'ins' and 'outs'!" exclaimed Peter. "See what they 've brought upon us already—to waste Athens in talking about them!"

But the glory of past and present soon blended to drive from the grumbler every thought that was not of pure rejoicing, when they watched the sun go down behind "his Delphian cliff."

Peter had lifted Sybil to rest on a shattered pedestal in the grass under the eastern range of pillars of the Parthenon, now deserted, save for a few other



visitors, and the guardians of the place, who were jingling their keys in impatience for the orb of day to go down and let them be done with gaping travelers. And thence our couple had strayed down to the platform on the western end of Nike's lovely temple, and stood looking at the scene in the silence of perfect sympathy.

Sybil could not know what this meant to his thirsty soul, for the first time slaking itself at immortal fountains; but she saw his deep pleasure, and was glad in it. They were standing where old Ægeus stood to look for the ship that was to bring him news of his son Theseus' victory or defeat in the encounter with the Minotaur; as he watched, the royal vessel had come into view, but with black sails, and the king, taking this for an announcement of his son's death, had leaped headlong to destruction from the cliff.

Just now the far reach of mountains, valley, sea, and islands was bathed in "the tender grace of a day that is dead." Nothing like it had ever greeted Davenant's eyes before. The memory of it would go with him to his grave.

The last rays of the sun saw them hurried by the guides from their classic pinnacle where all was bliss. Driving back through the *basse ville* of Athens, the cheerful scenes of the street after working-hours were in strong contrast with the forsaken ruins overhead. At the wine-shops, and outside the house doors, women, children, soldiers, and peasants were meeting, greeting, circling, and chatting, like a chorus scene of the opera. Men and women in Albanian dress, manly and handsome Cretans in their baggy knee-breeches with boots



reaching half-way up the bare calf, some Turkish women in yashmaks, made points of color in the scene. Greek women and girls were at the fountains, filling stone amphoræ. Between the white-, pink-, and yellow-plastered house walls—between the hedges of cactus, aloë, palm, and carob—arose with every passing by of wheels or foot-passengers a gray dust, thick and heavy, that, settling upon the inhabitants, did not appear to incommode them in the least.

THERE was no help for Sybil Davenant. Although she had said to herself that she would never go near her, she knew quite well that pay or receive a visit from the unconquerable Mrs. Willoughby she must. She found in her rooms, on the return from driving, the cards of all the party, with an urgent invitation from Mrs. Willoughby to join them at dinner, which was at once declined.

“You had better go alone first, after dinner, and I will stray in afterward,” said Peter, with a groan. “A man always makes a poor show when on bridal exhibition. I shall go for a stroll through the streets, and you can say you don’t know where I am.”

Sybil’s appearance in Mrs. Willoughby’s drawing-room—the one appertaining, of course, to the most expensive suite of the hotel—was the occasion of a lively welcome from two women who had exhausted each other’s conversation.

“Our men are all scattered somewhere,” said Mrs. Willoughby, a little more confident in manner than when Sybil had last seen her. “Claribel and I were just wondering if you would not come. And we are



dying to see your husband. I've told Claribel what a beauty he is—an excuse for any girl's rash—"

"Go on; don't be afraid," said Sybil, blushing a little, but mistress of herself. "You cannot say more of him than he deserves. He will come in presently to thank you for the emotion the flag on your yacht inspired in his patriotic breast."

"Oh, my dear! I sometimes say to Mr. Willoughby I wish we could run up another set of colors. Our flag is just the signal for us to be fleeced in every port we go to. The yacht's a very nice one, certainly. My cabins were fitted up for Mrs. Wuthering, who has such sweet taste. But one can't stand the noise and smells of these Southern harbors. Besides, it's a change to get into a hotel and see somebody; though unless you happen to know people, I think these foreign hotels are very keep-to-one's-self places. It's ever so much livelier at home."

"I know nothing whatever of hotels at home," said Sybil, "except to leave cards at them."

"Nor I," said Claribel, not to be outdone.

"I don't mean that I ever stay at hotels at home," Mrs. Willoughby hastened to say. "Of course not" with two houses of my own. You have no conception of our troubles with our new house in Fifth Avenue last year. After I'd furnished it I was a wreck—a perfect wreck—and that's the reason for this trip."

For a wreck Mrs. Willoughby certainly preserved a comfortable weight and aspect. But Sybil had heard so many of her class making excuses to come abroad and wander, through excess of money and vacuity of mind! Mrs. Willoughby was just a shade better than



the Americans who, in so many foreign cities, form colonies, and are content to dwell together in insularity of spirit among those who will know them not.

Mrs. Willoughby was actually bored beyond measure by her Grecian sojourn. The true aroma of the place could never be perceived by her. In Paris, London, at the German baths, or in the Italian capital, she might have found some kindred spirits and much diversion; but here!

And it was not what it seemed, to be the head of such a party as were her guests. The men treated her with but scant politeness. Her husband, having asked them at her bidding, often wished he could dismiss them, giving each a return ticket and hastening him home. Miss Claribel Hilton, a dark beauty with a keen eye to the main chance, had set out intending to utilize the cruise not only in killing time, but by accomplishing a long-eluded capture of Mr. Willy Lang.

The most agreeable incident, so far, of Claribel's travels had been running, in this way, upon the bride and groom who had effected such a meteoric disappearance from Newport. She wanted something to put in her "letters home," she said; but Claribel was suspected of eking out a slender stock of pin-money by contributing items of so-called "social interest" to fashionable journals. She had also a keen desire for Sybil to hear the general expression of belief that Miss Hilton would succeed her in the place Sybil had vacated.

"If you want gossip, I can give you a good deal from Newport in some cuttings that have been sent me," she said, fully aware that these columns con-



tained many statements of the nature she desired to impart.

"Oh, no, thanks," said Sybil. "We have n't yet reached the stage of the honeymoon when one welcomes an enemy. We are shutting our eyes, indeed, to everything at home till we see Sandy Hook again."

Miss Hilton bridled. She felt she had not made exactly a success.

"It will be nice for me to let our friends know you have survived all that has been said of you," she went on pleasantly.

"Shall you print it?" asked Sybil, now thoroughly aroused.

Vexed with herself for minding such pin-sticks, she turned to talk with poor, worried Mrs. Willoughby, who found herself in the position of a theatrical manager between leading ladies at war.

"Then you do mean to go back home?" pursued Miss Hilton, after a moment's rest. "Won't you find it rather a change? I believe your husband does n't go out much—Mrs. Stanley said he did n't—"

"He has gone out now," answered Sybil, with decision.

What might have ensued was prevented by the entrance of the men. Mr. Willoughby, who brought up the rear, having managed to pass an hour at billiards, was now looking forward to the time when he might be allowed to go to bed.

The others, discovering in Mrs. Davenant much more of an attraction than in the too evident Miss Claribel Hilton, advanced with animation to surround her. When Davenant came in, he found his wife the



brilliant center of a little group of masculines, reinforced by poor Mr. Willoughby, who had hailed with satisfaction something that would oblige him to keep awake. Mrs. Willoughby, with her strip of tapestry-work, and Claribel, knitting a golf-stockings destined for the manly calf of Mr. Lang, sat, dull outsiders in the tribute to Sybil's charms.

Davenant's arrival changed the situation. Suppressing a desire to hit to the right and left, and carry Sybil away from these fellows to—one of the peaks of Hymettus, let us say,—he displayed an ease and good-humored courtesy that won for him approbation undiluted. But Sybil knew that, spite of appearances, the sooner she cut short the evening the better for Peter's reputation; and, resisting all efforts to draw her into a water-party the next day, she hastened to make her adieus.

"You poor dear, what a hero you were!" she said in the corridor. "But you could not have held out much longer."

"And what a heroine my wife was! Sybil, what have you done to antagonize that Hilton girl?"

"Nothing more than to *be*," she said, shrugging.

"She is in love with Lang. Lang cares not a rap for her. He was probably at one time in your train—"

"What an unraveler of plots my lawyer is! Lang has really cared for but one person—himself."

"But he was reputed to be your follower. That accounts for it."

"Let us go out on the portico and look at the moon," she said, drawing him out into the peerless night.



THE next day they went by carriage to Eleusis. A smart shower of rain refreshed the atmosphere, falling when they had but just passed into the suburbs with the cactus hedges and the plaster walls prickly with thistles growing atop, the gnarled, warty old olive-trees and the oleanders leaning out of the courtyards, all gray with dust of summer.

Up the hilly road they rode between pine-trees in shape 'like lilac plumes, and of a bright spring green. The rain, that had brought out from the earth a delicious scent of wild herbs, ran away in yellow rivulets to the valleys. Beyond them were bold, darkling, wood-crowned summits with velvet clefts, not so long since haunted by brigands, but now in possession of archaic shepherds wearing mantles of rough cloth, leggings, and steeple-crowned hats, and carrying guns to keep away the wolves from their "black sheep and white." Groups of local militia patrolled the hills to see that the wandering flocks kept sacred the inclosures of the farmers. These mounted infantry wore frilled petticoats, white leggings cross-gartered with black, and Albanian slippers with tufts of red silk on the toes. In peasant carts, gaily painted, drawn by mules in bright harness, the owners, trusting to their faithful beasts to find the way home, lay asleep amid sacks, barrels, piles of wicker bottles, and empty baskets. Ancient crones in sleeveless overcoats of white wool with stripes of black embroidery sat upon donkeys, carrying on their laps rosy babies slumbering amid vegetables, fowls, and fruit. Children, brown and merry, ran beside stalwart peasants; and straight-backed girls, bearing amphoræ on their heads, walked



with a free, firm tread in heelless slippers. And this, as Sybil saw it, was the modern procession upon the classic Sacred Way!

They had stopped for a bit to visit the ancient Byzantine church at Daphní, with its old mosaics newly brought to light by the Grecian Archæological Society; and then drove on to where the Bay of Eleusis, a rippled sheet of blue, laughed as it came up to their feet.

Here, where once Demeter's maidens danced and sang, and waved their garlands about the flower-wreathed animals they led to sacrifice, our couple fell to talking, as moderns will, of subjects far removed from these retrospects of long-gone days.

"You did not hear me, dearest; you are not listening," said her husband, after he had repeated a remark about the lakes above the road, wherein the priests of Eleusis used to fish. "Now you are thinking of something that gives you pain. May n't I share it, Sybil?"

They were on the rear seat of an old *calèche*, the dragoman and driver up in front. For the last ten minutes the dragoman had consented to intermit his eternal contributions to their knowledge of events and localities, and was enjoying a cigarette.

"It is nothing — just a trifle," she contradicted herself in feminine fashion. "I wish, Peter, we were going to housekeeping in that red farm-house behind the high walls! I like its tiled roof with the gay colors, and the vines trailed over the balcony in front, and those vineyards and olive-orchards all around; but alas!"



"Why do you sigh? You must tell me, Sybil," urged the impatient lover.

"I am vexed with myself for caring what that girl said last night."

Little by little he drew from her her tilt with Clari-bel Hilton. His eye flashed and his lip curled when he heard it.

"You could mind that? *You*, who are my wife! *My* wife!"

"Peter, I told you I was ashamed of it. I am not a strong, big man. I'm only a girl brought up to consider these things all-important. If I do not think so still, it is because I fell in love with you."

"The triviality of it! The vulgarity! Why, we are as far above such people as— That it should find a lodgment in your brain, much less wound your sensibilities—"

Sybil hung her head, blushing deeply.

"Do these puppets flatter themselves they are 'living in an ethereal atmosphere and breathing the air of the gods'? And can my Sybil fancy—"

He stopped suddenly, as if disdaining to carry out the protest. Sybil, who had never seen him angry, shrunk within herself. She thought he was making it unnecessarily hard for her, and bringing superfluous energy to bear upon his expressions.

"Puppets they may be, but till now they have been all the friends I have had—that is, if you mean those I lived among till I met you," she said.

He did not answer, and in this strained mental attitude they drove to the foot of the hillside scarred with excavations, and scattered with the relics of the



glorious Demeter's shrines. Leaving the carriage before a little wine-shop in the village, they climbed the slope, and after ascending the steps of the Propylæa, stood at last upon the marble portico of the great Temple of the Mysteries. The autumn sun fell in floods about them, but the air from the Ionian was cool and crisp. In the intense, clear light, the mountains of Salamis seemed near enough to caress with the hand. The sea sparkled with a million facets. In that moment of supreme beauty the spell of old days descended upon the pilgrims; their little troubles fell away, their hearts wavered toward each other, and then blended in tenderness.

"Do you know what the Eleusinian mysteries were?" asked Davenant of his bride. "First, worship of a woman,—a true, good, loving woman,—then the cult of a faith that led its votaries on from aim to aim of this world to trust in a world to come. We are standing in one of the most famous spots in historic Attica, and, as it seems to me, the source of the noblest impulses of those old pagans' lives."

"Forgive me!" murmured Sybil in his ear, as she rested her hand upon his arm.

This was not relevant, but Peter understood, and was touched by it. His brief anger long since spent, he had been reproaching himself bitterly for the pain he had caused her. They began anew their explorations, and before it was time to return Sybil had merrily proposed to him to "set up housekeeping" in the cave where Pluto had carried Proserpine to spend her honeymoon!



WITH all his desire to visit Olympia alone with Sybil, Davenant could not be selfish enough to deny her the delight of a run in the *Almée* to Patras, whence they would go on by rail to visit the ruined city of the divine Hermes. This excursion, projected by the men of her party, had found Mrs. Willoughby averse to again "undertaking to squeeze through that dreadfully narrow Canal of Corinth, where they had banged against the sides last time, and frightened her nearly to death."

Mrs. Willoughby therefore electing to go by rail to Patras, her husband felt that he must needs accompany her, thus leaving Sybil to chaperon Miss Hilton on the yacht.

By half-past eight of a fine, bright day, when the arch of blue overhead seemed a single hollow gem, they embarked at the Piræus and, taking possession of the wicker chairs and umbrellas on the carpeted deck, were soon cutting the sapphire sea to round Salamis. Sybil, leaning back, with Lang established at her side for the morning, took as a matter of course this situation, that proved so annoying to her husband—and to one other. She had always been accustomed to see men keeping at a distance from their wives when in parties on pleasure bent. For her, under the present circumstances, to withdraw with Davenant would have been manifestly in bad taste; and Willy Lang's languid civilities could give concern to no one save Claribel, whom he took visible pains to flout. Miss Hilton, in self-defense, assumed hilarity, laughing aloud, and engaging the others to admire her pretty vagaries.



Davenant, finding his occupation gone, walked off forward, and while smoking alone surveyed the scene with an interest unquenched by adverse circumstance. At midday they steamed in between the steep clay and gravel banks of the canal,—dreamed of in vain by Cæsar, Nero, and Adrian,—with its railroad bridge lying like a ladder across the chasm high above; and, making the entry of the Gulf of Corinth in safety, the *Almée* began a voyage every hour of which overflowed with interest and beauty.

“Luncheon, luncheon!” cried the thin, high-pitched voice of Miss Hilton in Davenant’s ear. “Antiquity’s all very well, but the rest of us are starving.”

“I am sure my wife will excuse me till we’ve passed the Acro-Corinth,” he said; “then I shall make up for my delay by eating all there is.”

“I keep forgetting that Mrs. Davenant is playing hostess for the day,” said Claribel, her eyes flashing through her mask veil of white gauze. “And so does she, apparently. One has n’t the heart to interrupt that nice long tête-à-tête, has one? You know, they say Lang values only what’s out of his reach. A year ago at Newport it was *she* who—but here am I letting my giddy tongue run on. Of course Sybil has repented of girlish follies, and is going to be a model matron now—just like her dear friend Etta!”

Davenant did not answer. With glass lifted, he was scanning the grand, bold promontory crowned with the ruined castle of Penteskoupia, at foot of which, close to the water’s edge, lies the modern town of Corinth.

“I suppose all moons must wane,” went on his



tormentor, artlessly. "Sybil was saying how immensely jolly it is to have run upon our jolly lot. To look at her, one would n't suppose she is a recent loving bride. But that's an immense relief to everybody. If there's anything that bores hopelessly, it is newly married gush."

Davenant, turning, directed his gaze across the wide, sparkling gulf to the range upon range of Boeotian and Peloponnesian hills. Above them towered Parnassus, gray and hoary, with patches of black moss in its cavernous depressions. The mountain of the Muses was now crowned with a wreath of blue-black cloud, whence a column of white mist, shot with sunlight, arose to heaven.

"An altar of the gods; not a green thing in sight; Apollo fled!" he muttered to himself.

Miss Hilton, properly rebuked for her impertinence, could not withhold a final shaft.

"Then I shall tell Sybil you want us to go to luncheon without you?" she said, moving off. "Take my word for it, she'll prove resigned. If she's a wise woman she'll make the best of being with people of her own set now. When she gets back to New York she may feel the need of them."

After luncheon, Sybil, slipping her arm through her husband's, led him away to a quiet spot.

"You have been teased by that horrid Claribel?" she said. "I saw it the moment you came in to table. Your eyes have a cloudy look; nobody's eyes are as beautiful as yours, Peter—"

"I was a fool to come on this party," he said, smiling at her feminine method of peace-making; "but



where you 're concerned I must always be a fool, I suppose. Sybil, this shows you our lives have nothing in common with chattering idlers. I can't fit my feet to their pace. I want you to myself, to walk with me, apart! If you love me, give up the attempt to join your old life with the new. Let us cut loose from your past, and work out our own future."

"My dearest Peter, you are not practical," she said, in perfect amity. "Because Willy Lang is an amusing do-nothing, and Claribel Hilton a sharp-tongued, spiteful creature, let us not be driven to make such desperate resolution! My whole heart is yours. I am happier with you than I could be elsewhere. But we can't break with people. In two words, we must live for others as well as for ourselves."

"My Sybil a moral philosopher!" he exclaimed in a voice that showed a tinge of vexation.

"Don't mock me, Peter. I am only talking common sense."

"Away with common sense when we are sailing under Parnassus!" he cried petulantly. Somehow, he seemed to her like a big, vexed child. The protecting, soothing impulse came over her with a wave.

"I love you," she said simply, turning upon him the gaze of her bluest of eyes.

THEIR day, thus checkered, passed into sunset. Lepanto, Don John of Austria and his courtiers dancing down to death, Byron and Missolonghi (whose two lights glimmered afar as the dusk fell), even the currant industries of the shores of this inland sea, were discussed between them at intervals, when-



ever Sybil could leave the party to join her husband. Davenant, throwing off all pretense of sociability, kept himself aloof—or, as Miss Hilton afterward informed her friends, sulked bearishly. Sybil did not mind his bearishness. She knew the cause of it, and forgave. But she was aware of a panic she had rather have been spared, lest the present conditions should extend into her future in a way that would hedge her in unpleasantly. She saw that between their two lives of every day an intermittent rivulet of separating habit ran. She resolved that, come what might, it should not widen to a constant stream.

These reflections went with her to Olympia into the presence of Hermes, standing on his pedestal, smiling immortally at the infant in his arms. And she noticed that Peter, who had hitherto yielded himself prisoner at once to such marvels of ancient art, with the homage of a rapt school-boy and a fond scholar combined, now stood before the masterpiece of Praxiteles in almost moody silence as he gazed abstractedly.

When they were in the train going back to Athens,—for it was resolved to leave the *Almée* at Patras pending the voyage of her owners to Corfu,—Mrs. Willoughby, who noticed Peter's aloofness from their party, of which Sybil was still the center, said with a laugh in the bride's ear:

"Seems a little out of sorts with us, does n't he? But dear me, child, it would n't be a honeymoon without a tiff or two! Besides, your honeymoon's over, days and days ago."

Sybil sighed.



## X



MISS CARNIFEX sat in her morning-room, directing envelops for the circulars of a newly organized society of which she was president, secretary, and board of managers in one. It had been a forlorn hope of charity, of which she had taken charge. Until it should be more upon its feet she would not expend a penny of their small fund in employing help for its clerical needs.

While thus occupied, her father, in bicycle costume, in which he resembled an ancient Strephon, came in, and stood discontentedly upon the hearth-rug before a little wood fire that the cool spring morning had made agreeable.

"I wish to goodness you 'd drop those decrepit widows, or whatever they are, and come for a spin with me out to the Riverside," he observed.

"With pleasure, daddy," said she. "I 'm on the last quarter of my last hundred, as it is. I thought you were safe and happy in your chair, reading that new novel I gave you, that everybody 's talking about."

"I 've had to go back as much as three times and



re-read a page to find out what the woman means," was the vexed answer. "Her sentences are so swathed in mystery I could n't make head or tail of the story. Give me a good, rattling novel of adventure in plain words, say I! I would n't exchange 'Monte Cristo' or 'Ivanhoe' for a year's issue of this modern stuff."

"Nobody 's going to interfere with your 'Monte Cristos' and 'Ivanhoes,' daddy. But, before I go to change, have you seen in the morning papers about that will of Mrs. Lewiston's?"

"No; but I hope the old woman relented, and left a few thousands a year to help out Sybil Davenant."

"No mention whatever of Sybil. With a few legacies to those spoiled old servants of hers, and a thousand a year to her cousin Annie James, what is not given to St. Clair Lewiston goes outright to build a new wing to St. Jeremy's Hospital, of which her husband was a director."

"I am sorry for that," said the old gentleman, thoughtfully. "But no one who knew her will be surprised. Davenant's refusal to live in her house spoiled the only attempt at peace-making. They say that poor stick of a son, St. Clair, is on his last legs, and his money will go to an uncle in Omaha. I'd have thought Mrs. Lewiston would outlive St. Clair, certainly. Gad! you may n't believe it, but she was a monstrous pretty girl. I remember her and her sister Sybil at a ball at old Delmonico's in Fourteenth street; dressed alike, in white tarlatan, with camellias in their hair. It made my heart go pit-a-pat when I danced a redowa with Sybil, I remember. She married Gwynne, a kind of a shilly-shally man who col-



lected embroideries and carried intaglios about in his waistcoat pocket. Gwynne could n't stand the crude atmosphere of America, he said. When I saw him in Paris, in '71, he was the most aimless ass I ever looked at. Spent his life in bric-à-brac shops, Hôtel Drouot, and all that. The only thing that kept me from wanting to kick Gwynne was that he knew wines."

"At least he was amiable, I've heard."

"Amiable! Who wants a man to be amiable?"

"It's a deadly fact, father, that you are so yourself."

"Nothing of the sort! I detest skim-milk. Nobody's worth living with who has n't got a dash of old Adam or Eve in 'em. The grudge I cherish against Gwynne is that he was one of the pioneers in this running-away-from-home-to-live-abroad business. And the best commentary I can make on that is to point you to a result. Look at his daughter, Sybil Davenant."

"Father dear," said Agatha, putting down her pen, and straightening her desk mechanically, "I think you are too severe on Sybil."

"They have been married hardly any time, and yet she has managed to warp that fine fellow away from his career."

Agatha's face was grave; her hand shook over her work.

"Indeed, daddy, that's too much to say."

"I know what I'm talking about. The whole bent of Sybil's life and thoughts is in the opposite direction from his; he adores her; and—you see the consequence."



"He is no weakling," cried Miss Carnifex, with spirit.

"No; it is the very strength of his love that 's blinded him to the rest. Grantham himself told me, when he dined here the other day, and you women were in the drawing-room, that—this was his very expression—'Davenant has stopped short.'"

"It is a phase. He will pass out of it. He will never stop, except to get breath by the way."

"It is ridiculous, in the first place, to see him dancing attendance on her at the kind of places she goes to. And what 's more, they can't afford it. They must be living beyond his means. When it is known Sybil's aunt has died without leaving her a penny, people will see that the Davenants have been going on too fast. When they first came home, he consulted me about a little house that I advised him to buy and try to live in for a dozen years. The next thing I heard was that they had rented a furnished house in a part where there are nothing but fancy prices. When we dined with them I could see that the whole scale is above what it ought to be. And, while she is as lovely and sweet and loving to him as ever, he looks jaded. Yes, Agatha, you know it; I see in your face you think so, too. Peter Davenant has made a big mistake. And if you 'll please remember, I told you what would follow that first meeting of theirs at the Granthams'."

"Daddy dear, if I'm going to wheel with you, I 'd better dress now," said his daughter, hastening from the room.

"You did not allow me to get in my fine point



about that marriage," went on her father, when, quite out of the park, they were speeding together along the Drive bordering the Hudson. "It is this. She finds a rival in his intense Americanism. For her sort, America is a place to endure with philosophy, then hasten away from. She expects her husband to tag after her, begad! But that Davenant won't do. He will stick to his work, keep his beliefs, but struggle against a perpetual current forcing him backward. And this, Miss Carnifex, is the kind of wife lots of sensible parents of your and my acquaintance are educating their daughters to be."

Agatha, in her heart painfully convinced, again turned the conversation. When they had gone as far as desirable, and turned, they met many other couples on wheels, enjoying the quiet of the morning hour. Among these they were saluted by Sybil Davenant and Mr. Willy Lang, who were going rapidly, she in high spirits.

"There's another thing an old foggy does n't fancy," resumed Mr. Carnifex. "The idea of a man down in his office slaving all day, and his young wife careering around on a bicycle in company with another fellow!"

"Daddy, I thought you considered a bicycle the greatest moral agent of the times."

"With a nincompoop like that!"

"Last time you mentioned him he was an addlepated sponge," suggested Miss Carnifex, with a smile.

"He is both—a sponge and an addle-pate. And considering that her name has been coupled with his lately in a very offensive fashion—"

"Has it?"



"Yes; and I'm even told that a morning paper—bah! I'm sick of the subject."

"I knew there was a story afloat about Davenant having treated her brutally on their wedding-journey, somewhere in Greece," said Agatha, flaming indignantly. "The most outrageous manufacture! But I never heard of this later invention. Father dear, don't you think if people would only leave young married couples alone, to work out their life-problems, things would go far better? I am shocked—grieved by what you tell me. Somebody should—it is hardly my place—who is there, though, to warn that poor thing? I believe she has not an idea of it. She takes Lang as a pendant—the sort of hanger-on women in her set have, because it's the fashion."

"An edged-tool play, at best. Never mind, Agatha; if we can't help her, let us be selfish and enjoy this fine spring day. There's a view for you—the river and the Palisades. Gad! what an appetite I'll have for lunch!"

But Agatha, slow to arouse to interference with other people's affairs, had determined to see if there was anywhere room for her to speak or act in Sybil's aid. The same afternoon she set out late to walk to the Davenants' house, and was joined in the Avenue by Ainslie.

"May I go with you a little way?" he said. "It is an age since I've got in to have a talk with you when there were not other men about."

"We can't succeed in entrapping so fine a gentleman to our lowly banquets, it appears."

"That's not fair. Both times you asked me I had



promised some one three weeks ahead. But I 'm beginning to swear off from the invitations. I 'm tired of them, to begin with, and, secondly, I find they don't fit in with working-hours next day."

"I hear golden opinions of you from my father," she said.

"He is flattering to a struggling kinsman, that 's all. I 'm really a duffer at business. But, having started in, I 'm not going to drop out; and, strange to say, I 'm beginning to have a glimmer of belief I can sometime get ahead."

"That is well!" she exclaimed. "I am heartily glad to hear it."

"It was because you were 'heartily' in favor of it that I first put my shoulder to the wheel, I think. There is nothing like a clear-eyed woman friend to help a fellow on his way. But I 'm at a wretched disadvantage beside so many fellows who were trained up to it step by step. As a matter of fact, I am like a foreigner getting naturalized. But no more about myself. You won't come in here and look at the pictures?" pausing before the portal of a gallery of renown.

"No; I have just time to get to Sybil Davenant's. You may walk with me there, if you like. But if she is in, you must leave me at the door. I am anxious to catch her, if possible, alone."

"It is long since I 've attempted that," he said, meeting her eye unconcernedly. "At first I kept away because it was dangerous to my peace of mind. Now I rarely find her without one man or another whom I don't like in attendance. Actually, I was



once goose enough to believe Sybil Gwynne superior to that kind of thing; now I find she 's like all the rest."

"You were her friend—you are still," said Agatha; "can't you do something to stem the tide of gossip that 's rising around her?"

"I would be glad to settle whoever started that abominable lie, if that 's what you mean."

"I do mean that. I hardly think her husband can be aware of it."

"If he is, what can he do? There 's some enemy at work with her good name. To-day there was a hint, in print, that her old lover Cameron was coming back to New York, but would find his way 'blocked.' Now, I believe Cameron has n't an idea of returning to New York. I hear, in fact, he 's going to marry an Honorable Miss Somebody he 's known all his life. But the idea will get abroad, and the originator's purpose will be served."

Agatha, whom a man-servant in groom's livery at Mrs. Davenant's residence had invited to walk in, felt a little timorous about her errand when on the point of meeting its object.

She passed through a square hall in the middle of the house, blocked with a table and chairs of carved Venetian wood, into a drawing-room crowded with furniture that seemed not only to have outgrown its quarters, but to be overdressed. In the light of a large, pink-shaded lamp, Sybil, wearing street attire, as if she had just come in, sat by a tea-table. The other inmate of the room was Mr. Willy Lang, who was just getting up to go.



"I was delighted to hear your name," said Sybil, affectionately taking her visitor by the hand. "You are one of those of whom one never is allowed to have enough. Sit down in that chair; it's one of the few comfortable seats in the house. I hate rented furniture; don't you? But what are we paupers to do? If we ever get a house of our own, I shall have nothing to put into it but some of my mother's things that have lain for years in a storage warehouse. Black-satin chairs, and couches with red buttons, and 'suites' of blue-flowered brocatelle with bullion fringe. Can't you see them? Sugar and cream? How well you look! I thought so when we met you in the Drive to-day; and your dear old, crusty, clever, sweet-tempered father!—he is an evergreen!"

"It was because we met you that I came," said Agatha, who did not lack for courage; "and what I saw when I got here gave me a better reason for making myself disagreeable."

"Willy Lang? Why, he's a fireside animal in every house where he chooses to drop in. My dear Agatha Carnifex, you surely don't credit any of the absurdities you hear about me and himself?"

"You know, then, that people talk? In that case—pray pardon me; if you were my sister I'd say the same—is it wise for you to be seen with him twice in one day?"

Sybil could not be vexed; but she answered the hint of danger by a ringing laugh of amusement.

"Why, Lang is so good to bicycle with, I can't afford to lose him. And you, who know Peter, can think Lang dangerous?"



"I don't think so. The world is not so discriminating."

"Then trust me. Just now, since Aunt Lewiston's death, we can go nowhere, and I need something to take me out of myself. Oh, Agatha, you do house-keeping! Is n't it simply awful, with these servants we have? I wonder if that man is listening behind the portières. One never knows, else, how they find out all our affairs. I have a tower of Babel in my little servants' hall: a Swedish cook, a French maid, an English butler, a Belgian footman, and a Finnish laundress! And I begin to believe I hate them all. The winter has been one wild confusion, shifting and changing them. They backbite each other so there is not a moment's peace. This morning my cook asked an hour's leave of absence to take a bicycle-lesson, that she might go out on the road with 'the Stanley girls'—meaning Etta's servants! I wish you could see my cook—forty-five, fat, and blowzy. I believe my butler takes photographs; and the footman plays on a mandolin."

"Did you hear of the lady whose cook told her the servants liked the new butler, because he gave them such interesting lectures about how they were all descended from Mr. Darwin?"

"I wish mine were," said Sybil. "There would be some hope of law and order then. And the prices of things—the bills—the cheating of tradespeople! Agatha, I'm afraid I'm glad there is no place like home."

"You naughty girl!" said her friend. "It's because you were taken unexpectedly. You knew nothing of



our eccentricities of New York service. And, if I may say so, this little house must be overcrowded with people to neglect the work."

"I suppose so; I have n't the least idea," said Sybil, helplessly. "I began the way I thought things ought to be, and Peter knew less than I did. If it had n't been for a tremendously good fee that came to him directly we got back from our wedding-journey, I believe we'd have starved. And I'm sure I do prodigies of housekeeping. I look under things, and sniff at places, and make out the nicest little menus with the cook. We have no carriage, and simply ruin ourselves in cabs to go out to dinner and the opera and balls."

"Your husband goes to balls? The world is revolutionized!"

"He is an angel!" cried Sybil. "He even offers to go with me. And he stays out the cotillion like a lamb. Etta says he is a revelation of what may be done with unpromising material."

"And he likes it?" said Agatha, after a pause.

"He does n't mind. Perhaps he would like better if we had a little more time to ourselves at home. But how can we, with dining out so much—the usual thing, you know—I've never done anything else. Certainly he's a great success; even Etta says so. Women rave over him. But I'm not at all jealous. I like him to be admired; and especially since Claribel Hilton talked so patronizingly at first about Peter's not 'knowing people.' I believe it was Claribel who launched us! I think, but for her, I'd have been content to fall out of society. I have that maid she had last year,—Françoise,—and I suspect the



creature goes and boasts to Claribel of all our gay doings."

This, alas! was not the wife Davenant had dreamed of winning, thought Agatha, with a real pang. Sybil's rattling speech, her touch of recklessness, must come from some worry she did not choose to display.

She showed Agatha the house, no part of which revealed a spot that pointed to repose after a busy day. It was the perch of birds of passage; that was all.

"There's something lacking, but I don't know what it is," commented Mrs. Davenant, frankly; "and Peter, not having had a home since he was a little boy on the plantation, can't tell, either."

"I know," thought Agatha; but she did not speak.

While she was taking leave of Sybil, Mrs. Grantham was admitted into the hall.

As Agatha had before had occasion to observe, her friend Katrina had also suffered a change, hardly for the better. The long winter spent in engineering a *débutante* from one scene of gaiety to another, the half-sleepless nights, the rushing days, had told upon Mrs. Grantham's pleasant, placid countenance. She could hardly give herself time to sit down on Sybil's little sofa under the pink-shaded lamp. Through continually darting in and out of the houses of her acquaintances in this way, she had come to abhor little sofas and pink-shaded lamps.

The present visit could not be styled one of condolence upon the death of Sybil's aunt. Katrina knew, as did every one, that the Davenants had little cause to mourn that event any more than to expect consola-



tion of a substantial kind from it. She had heard also, from her husband, that Davenant's stand in his profession had begun to feel his relaxation of continuous interest in it, and that the young couple could not hope to maintain the liberal style of life in which they had begun. She had a sincere wish to be of service to Davenant's wife, but, like Agatha, hardly knew how to set about it. The sight of Miss Carnifex, already installed here before her, gave her a sense of encouragement.

"*Don't* go, Agatha," she pleaded. "Stop awhile with me, and I'll drop you at your door. I had expected to leave two more sets of cards to-day, but it's impossible. I am going to treat myself instead to a glimpse of you two nice women."

"My husband is one of your most grateful admirers," said Sybil. "Whether he will thank you as much hereafter for leading him into this whirlpool called matrimony, I can't say. But we cherish that delightful set of Thackeray you sent us—and your dear father's silver dish, too, Agatha. Whenever I look at them I think there are some real people left in the world."

"You may consider yourself lucky that you escaped a diamond cross from papa," said Agatha. "In his day, that was a wedding-present to special favorites."

"Then Peter would have worn the cross, not I. I saw disapproval of me in the dear old gentleman's eye this morning when we met you in the park. Dear Mrs. Grantham, Agatha has come here to scold me because—because—tell her why, Agatha."

"No one could scold you long; but Mrs. Grantham



will tell you no wife as young and pretty as you are can afford to throw the glove into the face of public opinion, no matter how sure of herself she is."

"Ah, no," said Katrina, sighing. "The world is very hard upon pretty young women who are brought before it for approval. I have even heard malicious criticisms upon my poor child, who, however, is going through her ordeal without the least thought of her judges. Often it seems to me not worth the trouble I've undergone to put her on exhibition, poor darling."

"Katty looks the picture of health and enjoyment," said Sybil.

"Yes; but her parents have had enough of it. Our home is demoralized. My husband and sons complain outspokenly. After all, the trouble is not altogether in the high pressure of the times and of our community. In the early days after my marriage people expected so much less; and young married couples were so much more—humdrum, I suppose we'd call it now. I remember, when we were rather poor, and I had my first home, with a tidy little maid in blue ribbons to open the door and wait on the table, how many happy evenings I spent in it, when my husband and I would sit under student-lamps, reading, and when now and again I'd listen to hear if one of my babies was stirring in the crib up-stairs. Often, in answer to that little helpless cry of one waking in the dark, have I sped, light-footed, to the nursery—often bent down and laid my cheek on baby's cheek, and soothed it to sleep again; and the pulse of that baby beating against mine has given me joy more exquisite than anything in life!"



SYBIL, going to her room after her friends had left, felt in a strangely softened mood. They were dining at home that evening, having withdrawn from an engagement out of respect for her aunt's memory. As she called Françoise to attend her in dressing, the woman emerged from the adjoining room with a flush upon her face.

"I was only putting away some shirts for monsieur," she muttered, although no apology was called for.

"Put out something white, Françoise,—that little high frock of Indian cashmere," said her mistress; "and then I sha'n't want you any more."

She wished to be alone. As she sat before her mirror, combing her wavy golden locks and twisting them up in a loose knot behind, remembrance came to her of the joyous weeks she and Peter had spent away together following their marriage. She went over the many acts of his life since that she felt must have been inspired by pure unselfishness. When she heard his key in the hall door it was impossible for her to keep still and await his coming up. She ran to the top of the stairs, calling out happily, "Oh, Peter, I am so thankful you have come!"

Peter was too young a husband to resist this. Three steps at a time he bounded up to take her in his arms. Noticing that she had put on the gown he liked best, that her simple hair-dressing was after his favorite fashion, he was the more delighted. A cloud that he had brought up-town and across his own threshold vanished from his brow.

"Sit here and talk awhile; you have time enough," she said, drawing him down beside her upon a couch. "For the last half-hour I have felt as if you would



never come. I 've been thinking, Peter, of many, many things. And I 'm going to be better to you, dearest. I 'm going to make you happier than I have done. When I remember all the distraction I 've brought into your life—"

"What is the cause of this fit of introspection?" he said, when they had sat in silence for a little while, both her arms clasped about his neck, her cheek to his.

"Oh, Agatha, I suppose—and Mrs. Grantham—and my own conscience. I 'm not strong enough for you, Peter. You should have chosen Agatha. All I can do is to be sorry when I 've been very, very bad."

"And have you now?"

"I 'm not going to spoil this moment by resurrecting my offenses," she exclaimed radiantly. "I only wish you 'd give me some way of proving how good I 'm going to be."

Davenant went into his room to dress, feeling a sense of relief from oppression. For weeks past he had realized that they were drifting, with no prospect of safe anchorage. His ambitions, prospects, ideas, that immortal part of him which had hitherto lent a spring to his step, a sheen to the sunshine, a glory to the air, had been under a spell. His love for Sybil, although grown deeper and broader, seemed yet to enmesh him in silken cobwebs as strong as iron. The beginning of the second half of his first married year had not found him a happy man.

With the warmth of her tender penitential promises in his heart, he told himself that things would go better. They were young; he was strong; the right way would open. Nothing was irremediable, provided Sybil loved him and her hand was clasped in his.



## XI



DAVENANT, hurrying into his room to dress for their belated dinner, did not at first perceive upon his toilet-table a note addressed to him in typewritten characters. The discovery made no impression on a mind absorbed with nascent hope of better things to come. What is one missive more or less, in the shower that daily falls upon a modern home? When he was ready to go down-stairs, he took it up and mechanically tore it open.

"Nothing is irremediable," he was still repeating to himself, as he drew out the contents of the envelop, "so long as Sybil is true to her higher self and me."

A clipping from a newspaper fluttered down and lay upon the back of a brush with a silver monogram—Sybil's gift. Davenant hardly took in, at first, the meaning of the typed words upon the sheet infolding it. When he did, the fierce blood surged into his temples. He glanced at the clipping, and his face grew darker still with wrath. Lies though they were, what he had read cut him like a whip.

Sybil, impatient at his delay, ran up herself to



hasten him down-stairs. As she came into the room, she stopped, dismayed by the expression of her husband's face. It was unlike anything he had ever shown to her before. When, frightened and wondering, she tried to take the papers from his hand, he tore them to bits and threw them into the fireplace.

"Peter, what is it?" she said faintly, her heart beating hard.

"Answer me. Has Lang been with you twice to-day?"

"Of course, Peter. This morning I wheeled with him, and this afternoon he joined me in the street, and came in for tea, as he has often done before."

"I forbid you to speak to him again. I'd like to kill him for what he's brought upon you!"

Sybil stood transfixed. She saw struggling in him the animal man that made her want to turn and flee from him. She waited in silence awhile, till his rage had exhausted itself. Then she spoke timidly:

"If it's only one of those slandering newspaper paragraphs that everybody gets—"

Davenant could not believe his ears. "Only"—this from a high, pure woman, lifted by his thoughts upon a pedestal above the mud of humankind!

"I don't know about your sort of men," he said blackly, "but in my part of the world we don't brook insult to the fair fame of our women."

"I have heard of those dear Don Quixotes of the South," she said with a little curl of the lip. "What a mercy you don't carry a six-shooter in your belt, and a bowie-knife in your boot! Peter, try to be reasonable. Lang can't help this any more than we can. I



don't know what's been said—I don't want to know; but if you think *your* wife is the only one—”

“Good God!” groaned Davenant. He dropped into a chair, clasping his hands over his eyes. What he suffered now was more acute than the pain of the slander.

“It must be owned, dearest, you are what Etta calls you—‘rococo.’ You belong to the most delightfully old-fashioned age. If you’d heard all the things *I* have that are said of men and women of our world,—of almost every one in turn,—you’d cease to think it such a mighty matter. So long as you know I’m all right, and Lang knows it, why should you mind so much? How can I forbid him the house without giving color to this nonsense? All such stories die down in time, and women are thought none the less of for them. Why, look at Mrs.—”

“Sybil, Sybil,” he pleaded, with the agony of one pushed further than endurance goes, “if you ever loved me, say no more. What you have said has burned into my heart.”

“But, Peter,” she persisted, putting her arm around his neck where he sat, “you distress me dreadfully. Indeed, indeed, I do not understand.”

“That is it, God help me!” he cried, ridding himself of her embrace, and getting up to walk to and fro—“you do not understand.”

Directly after dinner, which was eaten almost in silence between the married pair, Peter went out, telling his wife that he meant to work at the Bar Association library, and would not be home till late.

Sybil, going into her little drawing-room, sat down



before the fire, feeling truly wretched. As her lonely evening dragged itself along, she was glad of a ring at the front bell, followed by the announcement of her cousin, Mr. Lewiston.

This gentleman, with the touches of mourning added to his evening clothes, looked more than ever pale and shrunken. His small gray eyes peered out of red-edged lids. He dropped wearily upon a divan, doubled up his knee, nursing it with both arms, and complained of the chill of a late spring. After Sybil had exchanged with him a few commonplaces about his mother's funeral,—which she, with Davenant, had attended, in a front pew of the church,—St. Clair burst out jerkily:

"I 'm glad you 're alone, Sybil. I wanted to tell you by yourself that I consider it a brutal kind of thing, the way my mother's left you. You stood lots at her hands that other people don't know about, and to be chucked overboard like this, when you need money most, is n't what I call nice."

"We can't say anything, now, St. Clair," answered Sybil; "and I should tell you that my husband has not opened his lips in comment, one way or the other."

"Then he 's a devilish sight more civil than I 'd be under the circumstances. It would have been all in your favor had you two agreed to go to live in Washington Square when she made you that offer last Christmas."

"Ah, but what an offer! We could n't, in any self-respect, accept it. She treated Peter like—oh! as I said before, we can't talk of it now."



"Well, you know what you want, of course; and Davenant's a plucky sort, certainly. But the long and short of my visit is to say that to-day I've made my will, leaving you all, and more than, you'd have got from my mother. And I wish you'd take something from me now to make amends for it. I sent my lawyer, you know, to offer this to your husband; but he declined flatly. I'd be glad to get you to reconsider it."

"My dear St. Clair, you have always stood by me!" exclaimed she, touched by his kindness. "But—but—you don't know Peter. He's the soul of independence. Marrying me against the wishes of my aunt makes him more touchy, I suppose. At any rate, I know he would n't hear of it. When he told me about your offer, he was really grateful to you; but I could see nothing would have moved him to accept—"

"Then you're pretty comfortably off, I take it," said St. Clair, with a feeble grin of wonder at such disinterestedness in this age of gain; "or else Davenant's a wonder from Wayback."

"That's just what he is," said Sybil, laughing, and then sighing—"a wonder from Wayback; and so dreadfully set in his opinions about right and wrong."

"My dear girl, you should hold on to your treasure," commented her cousin, who was already beginning to weary of a conversation for him too long sustained. "I must be off now to the club. I think I'll be sailing in a few weeks, to try a new place my doctor's found for me in France. If I can do anything for you meantime, you've only to call on me."



Sybil saw him go out upon tottering legs, her servant buttoning him up in a fur-lined overcoat before putting the little man into his brougham.

"How could I tell St. Clair," she asked herself, sinking again into her chair, "that Peter says his reputation is such I must not receive or hold communication with him alone? He meant well, and was really generous; and if Peter knows of this, it will only be for me to be lectured up and down. Peter expects too much. He is unreasonable; and, until to-night, I had no idea what his temper can be. Supposing he should ever turn against *me* like that! I should die."

The tears coursing down her cheeks were with difficulty stanchèd when she went up to bed. She thought Françoise, who awaited her, looked more self-satisfied than usual. Then it occurred to Sybil to inquire about the note left upon her husband's dressing-table.

"Who put it there?" she asked.

"*Ma foi*, madame," began the woman, then poured out a rapid and wordy explanation of how it was the footman who had brought the letter in question up to her while she was engaged in putting away monsieur's shirts. Jean had been asked at the door, by the messenger who bore it, to see that it reached monsieur as soon as he came in. Françoise had no idea the note was—

"You are not asked to give me your ideas," said Sybil, freezingly. "You can go now; I have done with you."

And Françoise, flouncing down to the servants'



hall, discussed with her mates, in gleeful enjoyment, every detail of the promising imbroglio up-stairs, together with many other matters connected with their employers handed along by the servants of other houses where free discussion of personalities goes on at table.

"That woman has a hateful face," said the young wife, wearily. "But Etta says they are all like that, and the only thing is to get what one can out of them, and pay them well."

With these and other graver thoughts to vex her, Sybil fell asleep.

The difference between Peter and herself was not cleared at breakfast-time next day. When she saw that he was in an unapproachable mood, she took fright, and, keeping to her room, ordered a cup of tea to be brought to her there. Peter, hastening off directly afterward, had only a word, and that a formal one, with her.

But if he cared not to speak, Davenant could act, and did so. Part of his work during the days ensuing, at the expense of office affairs of moment, was to trace to its fountainhead the paragraph New York had been enjoying for a week before he saw it. He was not one to sit with folded hands, and say, "This should not be, but what can we avail?" Step by step he followed the lie back to its originator. The money this cost him, by the way, he considered well spent. His suspicion that to Miss Hilton they owed their deadly stab in the dark proved perfectly correct. And Miss Hilton, her secret sold by her employer, received from her victim a rebuke and a warning that caused



her coward soul to tremble. Davenant smiled grimly when he left her. There was no mercy in his heart for her species of offender, and he made it plain. Claribel's only consolation, in her crushed and alarmed condition, was that the venom of this particular shaft could not be recalled; and she felt quite sure that Davenant would never let any one know of his awful visit to her.

Simultaneously with his bloodless victory over a foe most dangerous, Davenant received an overture to enter into a matter of professional business that opened to him a vista of excellent promise. It was of a nature that he, of all men, could deal with best, owing to previous connection with one of the principals engaging him. The success of it would mean fame, and substantial reward in fortune. The opportunity to recoup himself for the bad months past had thus come as if with a trumpet-blare of triumph. But in order to succeed, he must bring to the essay his best powers of brain and energy; he must work unflaggingly, turning neither to the right nor to the left, nor pausing by the way. This, a year before, would have been a light matter to consider. Now he gravely turned in his mind how he could detach himself from Sybil's life in order to push his affair through. If he could only convince her of the interests involved—of the vital importance, to them both, of his working by himself!

Davenant, who was going through what many another young man of ambition has had to meet, felt himself a brute to think of Sybil as an interruption to his career. But the time had come when she must



give way, or he go under. He was keenly and bitterly alive to the fall backward in his climb of the mountain of professional success. To make good lost progress, to scale the heights again, and go still higher, was now his healthy and absorbing wish.

These few days of coolness between Sybil and himself had proved intolerable to both. He knew that his own inability to pass at once out of the grief and shame the Hilton incident had caused him was greatly to blame for this. Sybil, rebounding like a child after a fall, had been ready and eager to make friends with him.

When the day came that, having cleared all impedimenta from his way, Davenant set to work in hard earnest in his great enterprise, he went home lighter of heart and step than he had been in weeks. He found Sybil the better for a walk with Agatha Carnifex. It was an auspicious moment in which to unfold his plan of intended preoccupation and absorption for some time to come. Sybil, loving and sensible, would recognize the necessity. He felt sure that she would now prove herself the helpmate as well as the adored and cherished wife.

"Oh," sighed Sybil, when, after pouring out his heart to her in glowing eloquence, her husband paused, gazing with almost feverish anxiety into her lovely eyes, "while you were talking I felt like somebody at the bottom of a cliff. I can't climb it, Peter; indeed I can't. But you sounded grand and inspiring, and you make me see what a wretch I'd be if I did n't help you. You know, dearest, that this is the best time for you to work. We are going nowhere; people



are forgetting us. Besides, there is really nothing to do in New York after the 1st of May."

"I have not yet discovered that fact," said he, with a brightening face.

"Of course you must work, and I 'll mope and try to make the best of it. If there were any peace in our household, I could do better; but to-day there 's been another cataclysm. That horrid Françoise, that you made me send away, has left a trail of mischief after her."

"For heaven's sake, don't mention down-stairs!" interposed he.

"I don't mean to. All we can do is to live over the powder-magazine, and thank our stars when it does n't explode. But I 'll try, dearest; I 'll try to be happy without you—"

"*Every* evening for a while?" asked he.

"Oh, dear, it is dreadful! But if I must, I must. And, Peter darling, what 's more, I 'll promise not to mention summer plans till you give me leave."

FINDING it a convenience to work away from home, Davenant now adopted the habit of leaving her as soon as their dinner was over, and not returning till she had long been asleep. For a week Sybil struggled valiantly against the depression of this mode of existence. She read, practised her music, regulated her household accounts, and tried to fulfil the whole duty of a home-keeping American wife.

But the hours were long, and against them warred all the previous years of her pleasure-seeking foreign life. At the end of the first week she put up a faint



plea that Davenant would stay with her for that Saturday evening, at least.

"My poor brave darling, I wish I could," he said, kissing her tenderly. "If you knew, Sybil, how I am going ahead in seven-league boots, you 'd pardon me. My brain was never clearer; my powers of work seem inexhaustible. And it is *you*—you who are at the bottom of it. Without you I 'd be dead-wood. Oh, my Sybil, this life of yours and mine is a commonplace partnership to the rest of the world, but to us it's a kingdom. Let us control it royally. Help me, as only you can help me, to hold my throne."

He was gone, and the little house was doubly still for the loss of that buoyant, manly presence. Sybil, who nowadays cried often, bowed her head down upon her hands, and wondered if this was what she had married for. Peter's great speeches, as she called them, pleased her ear; but to them she could not open the innermost door of her understanding. She thought them picturesque, high-flown, and bore with them for the sake of her love for him, which had been steadily growing since their marriage. But she wished her husband were more pliant, more inclined to take trifling enjoyments, more like husbands she had been most accustomed to see, who shared with their wives in the commerce of social small talk.

She went to the window, and looked out. An electric light opposite showed the deserted street. The houses all about were dull, uniform, respectable. The few passers-by were faded working-people. Everything seemed commonplace, uninteresting. She envied her servants down-stairs, who, to the twang of



the footman's mandolin, were apparently capering or playing hide-and-seek—such a merry racket they made.

At this moment a carriage drove up to her door, disgorging a party consisting of a lady and two men in evening dress. Sybil, retiring behind her window-curtains, recognized her old-time chum, Mrs. Stanley, attended by a new Venezuelan attaché from Washington and by Mr. Willy Lang. Before she could form any plans for defense, they were in upon her. Etta, who liked to indulge in flights of this description, had conceived, after dinner, the idea of going to a certain music-hall, "just for a minute, to see Amina, the woman who 's dancing there now," she urged. "Jack said he 'd come, but at the last minute backed out, because it 's a bore, and Amina's ankles are too thick. Do come with us, Sybil; I depend on you. As to your mourning being an excuse, that 's quite too ridiculous. Nobody in your position would think of keeping in after a month. It will cheer you up to be with us. You must, now; I 'll take no refusal. Davenant can't complain, if he leaves you here moping like this; now, can he, Lang? Do you help me to coax this hold-back Sybil not to spoil our little 'spree.'"

Sybil blushed vividly.

"I need no one to coax me, except you," she said to Etta, while Lang looked imperturbable.

"Then come, come! Ring for your maid, and get a little hat. That plain gray crepon is just ideal; you 'll look like a nun who has determined to cheer up a bit. If we are bored, as Jack says I will be, there 'll be nothing but to come out again."



Sybil, wishing to say that her husband contemned the practice of women of good society attending music-halls, could not maintain this, or anything serious, in the face of Etta in her present mood.

DAVENANT, having worked until turned out of his Lawyers' Snug Harbor by extinction of the lights, started to walk home in a very happy and elated frame of mind. Not only was his brain singing a pæan over its congenial labors of the evening, but his heart reverted to the image of Sybil as he had left her—beautiful, graceful, wistful at his going.

"She can't know—I can't expect her to know—how she fills my being, or that would be enough for her, I think," he meditated, striding away with firm footsteps to his home.

At a corner, coming out of a club, he ran upon Mr. Cleve.

"Hallo, Davenant! Glad to see you. Let's keep together till I get to my street. I thought you must be at the library when I saw your pretty wife, an hour ago, at that raree-show of Amina's, along with Mrs. Stanley and Willy Lang."

"I can't imagine what you mean," said Davenant. "My wife is at home this evening."

"Oh, I see," said old Cleve, discreetly. "Then I must have mistaken some one else in the box for her."

He would rather have bitten his tongue out than have made such an old-fogy blunder. The common belief that Mr. and Mrs. Davenant were more blindly in love with each other than before, since that attempt to start a scandal about Lang and Sybil, had possessed



his mind. He tried to think of a good story with which to cover his stupid break. But the certainty of having seen Sybil under the circumstances described annoyed him. For once Mr. Cleve had not a joke upon his tongue.

When they parted, Davenant hurried on, but not so cheerfully. Despite himself, he was depressed by the image Cleve had conjured up. A light burning in Sybil's room showed that she was still awake. He found her in her tea-gown, flushed and appealing, running to meet him at the top of the stairs.

"My dearest Peter," she cried, "since you left, guess what has happened to me! I have sown my first wild oats. I have been with Etta to see Amina! It was tiresome, and she did n't amuse me in the very least. And the tobacco-smoke got into my hair so that I 've been all this time brushing it out. Be sure I shall never want to go again."

"Etta?" said he, coldly. "This was not a plan prearranged, then?"

"Of course not. I had n't dreamed of it when she came, and I did n't want to go. But you know Etta. When she has set her mind to anything, she will never give it up. Don't be afraid, Peter; your wife has no taste for wild oats."

"And, besides Etta, who was of the party?"

His persistently cold tone, chilling her impulse of full confidence, and the line between his brows, bringing back the day of his fury against Lang, suddenly overbore her. Her eyes fell; her face grew pallid; she looked like a woman conscious of concealing wrong-doing.

"Sybil, answer me!" he said.



"If you mean Lang, he was of the party. It was not my fault; but your speaking to me like this only makes me not care whether it was or not!" she cried rebelliously.

Davenant saw that she spoke truth; but, having worked himself up to this pinnacle, poor human nature would not allow him to come down from it. She, on her side, felt a hard, stubborn lump in the place of her usual loving, melting heart. They parted for the night under a cloud that seemed to both of them to shut out heaven and earth.

After a day or two of this miserable difference, the couple came together again in a burst of common self-reproach. Davenant determined to use the strength of his manhood to prevent a recurrence of the scene; and Sybil, who had not had his distraction of hard work and contact with the outer world, felt that if it did happen again she should give up all pretense of considering herself a happy wife. In this state of mind, she avoided his friends, whom she could not bear to have suspect what was passing in her life. While Davenant's work forged ahead with a steady progress, and he was engrossed with preparations for a day to come in court, Sybil went one afternoon to see Mrs. Stanley.

Etta, for Etta, was almost gay. She was making up a little party to go to a "tiny island" Jack had been induced to buy in the Bay of Chesapeake, where he could go in season for duck-shooting, and whereon there was an ancient house he had just had overhauled and made fit to live in. (It is a fact of latter-day notoriety that when ladies of the Etta group



have exhausted their possibilities of continents, they desire to appropriate islands.) Etta had just been on the point of writing to Sybil to come up and talk it over. Of course Sybil and Peter would go, or rather would come on to join her there. Etta and Jack were setting off soon, with some servants, and when they should have opened and aired the house would expect their guests. Mrs. Arden and her daughters, and quite a pleasant little "gang" (so Etta called them), were coming to "camp out."

Sybil's heart gave a jump of pleasure at the idea of this glimpse of easy, cheerful outdoor life. She was familiar with Etta's habit of "camping out," if only for a fortnight—with all the luxuries of life about her. As Mr. Carnifex had said, the Stanleys knew how to do things thoroughly. She promised Etta to let her know at once, and with a buoyant feeling awaited the return of Peter, that she might win his assent to the invitation.

"My dear Sybil," her husband said, when her scheme was glowingly unfolded, "how can you think of it? I could no more go away from town now than I could change that rug into a flying-carpet to save our traveling expenses."

"But we have not once been out of town since we landed. I have never stopped so long in town on a stretch."

There was, could she have seen it, a noble look in her husband's eyes—a patient, brave, and far-seeing look. He spoke gently:

"Do you remember my telling you, once, that New York is my life?"



"I know; but every one's the better for a change at this time of the year. You can work all the harder when you come back. A week—what's a week, Peter? And we'll be so happy in the country. This house stifles me; it is so little, and has so many hangings. And the street is so ugly outside. One can't walk forever; and I've no way to drive, we are so poor."

Davenant saw her lip tremble. He felt like a parent refusing something to a beloved child.

"Courage, my darling! We sha'n't always be poor. At the present outlook, I'll soon have a purseful to give us a summer outing, pay all these bills that have piled up, and leave enough over to start next winter with. But put out of mind the idea that I can get away now, anywhere. Once and for all, it is out of the question."

Sybil said nothing. Between them the air was pulsing with thoughts each sent out to the other. Davenant's heart yearned over her. Her heart reproached him for making difficulties and conjuring up scruples. Since that wretched Lang affair, Peter had never been quite the same to her, she felt.

Presently she began again:

"I really think, Peter, *I* had better go to Etta, even if you can't."

Here Sybil felt reasonably secure. The army of traveling wives abroad, whose husbands are invisible, had long familiarized her with American complaisance in this direction. Whenever Etta felt like it, she took a maid and went—anywhere. Sybil, with her maid, could easily make the day's journey required to reach Etta's island.



"Do you want so much to go?" said her husband, tightening his lips in a way she did not like. "Sybil, I do not wish to seem ungenerous, and therefore I must tell you the full truth. After paying the last month's bills this morning, and settling one or two big outstanding ones, I am quite empty-handed. Your little funds have gone into your own clothes and spending-money. The servants' wages alone mount up tremendously. I was just making up my mind to ask you to dismiss the second man when you spoke to me to-night. I think we have got too expensive a cook; and if we—you—only knew enough to make a clean sweep of these nuisances, and begin fresh with a cheaper lot—"

"Do you know what cheap servants are, Peter?" cried she, woefully.

"I don't know. I'm afraid I only care about living honestly, within our means."

"It is awful—this drop," she said, sobbing. "I see now what I've brought upon you. Everybody told me I was making a mistake."

Peter was deeply wounded. He could find no words to answer her.

"Then it is because you have absolutely no money I may n't go away to Etta?" she asked.

"That chiefly, if you will," he said curtly, leaving her to another—and the worst—of her lonely evenings.

During this time of solitude Sybil's mind swung like a pendulum between good and evil. She loved Peter dearly, but thought him unreasonably hard and cold. She wished to stay with him, then reflected how little he kept by her nowadays.



She felt ready to bear anything for him, then quailed before the prospect of the meager arrangements he proposed. If she had only had money, all would have gone well. If she had only money now, all would go better, and, with money in pocket, she could treat herself to this jaunt about which Peter was so indifferent. At this point she thought of her cousin St. Clair, and his offers of help to her.



## XII



SYBIL knew, by experience of her cousin's indolent habits, that she could not expect to find him up and dressed and consuming his apology for a breakfast before twelve o'clock. Taking a hansom on the morning after her stormy talk with Peter, she drove to the house where St. Clair had his luxurious flat. The porter who directed her to the right floor, and the "buttons" who propelled her in the elevator, looked rather impudently at her, Sybil thought. But she was so full of her own intentions in the visit, so timorous about carrying them out, and so accustomed to think of St. Clair as she had best known him, a whimpering, helpless invalid in his mother's house, sharing her care with that of his two trained nurses, that she did not stop to consider appearances. Her cousin's own man, who knew her well, greeted her respectfully as he opened the door and invited her within. She found St. Clair, shriveled up in the depths of a chair that might have been a cardinal's for size and splendor, sipping a cup of malted milk.

"Good Lord, it's horrible!" he exclaimed querulously, as she commented on his poor breakfast. "To



live on wash like this, and my dinners weighed out for me in scales by that fellow of mine, who, on sixty dollars a month, has the digestion of an ostrich! What can I do for you? This is the first time you have honored me with a visit, and I hope it's to say your husband thinks better of letting me settle something on you out of my mother's estate."

"No, no," said she. "Peter is like a rock. I have found that out. He will never give up a point."

St. Clair was struck by a jangled note in her ordinarily soft and even tones.

"It's come to you, then, has it?" he asked, looking at her curiously. "It's rather soon, but it comes to all of 'em."

"What do you mean, St. Clair?" said his cousin, whose eye had been attracted by the sumptuous tapestries forming the portières of his rooms.

"What those French fellows that write the only novels I can read call *désillusion*. Hang it all, Sybil, I'm sorry. I'm not often sorry, but I am now."

"You mistake. I love my husband better than I did at first," she replied, the blood crimsoning her face and neck. "But—"

"But, but—there are always buts," said the little man. "Do you wonder I never put my head in the noose? Look here, Sybil. I wish you'd occupy that old barn of my mother's in Washington Square for me. It's an elephant on my hands. I can't rent it, and wild horses would n't make me go there to live."

"What do you take us for, St. Clair? I know very little about living, but I know we could n't afford



that. And it would be dreadful to push myself into a place that Aunt Lewiston shut me out of when she was alive. But it's about your helping me in another way I came here. I should be deeply obliged to you to—to lend me a little money that I can pay you when I get my next dividend."

St. Clair, who thought he knew something about loans of money to ladies expecting dividends, smiled. Getting up to walk over to his writing-table, he took a check-book from a drawer.

"Here you are. What amount, now? A thousand—five hundred? You have only to say the word. We'll agree that Davenant shall never know."

"One hundred would be all-sufficient," said poor Sybil, feeling a wave of shame run over her. When St. Clair proposed that she should keep this from her husband, it was the first time she had really felt a sense of impropriety.

"Oh, I understand. A pretty woman must have grist for her mill—or milliner," said her cousin, essaying, while in process of filling in the check, a consoling jocularity. "Only, this will soon be gone, my lady, and I want to give you a word of advice. I'm not one to preach, you'll think, and God knows it's so. But you've been kind and sweet to me, and you're a good little girl, too. Don't get into money scrapes that you can't tell your husband. Like to see that couple of new Monets of mine? Delirium Tremendous, my doctor calls 'em. You must go, eh? Remember me to Davenant. He's a man, Davenant is. Thought all the better of him for holding out against living in my mother's house when she offered



it. Wish you 'd take it now, though. Pay me rent, if you please—anything, so you rid me of the care of it. Perhaps by next winter you 'll repent. Good-by. The door, Clements; and shut it quickly, so that I may not feel the draft."

Sybil, thrusting her check into a side-pocket of her jacket, went away feeling crestfallen. It was her first essay as a borrower. She had never known money's value, having never wanted money's worth. Somehow, with all his liberality, she felt that St. Clair did not think quite as well of her as before she had made this demand on him.

But, having begun, there was no drawing back. Telling the cabman to drive her to Mrs. Stanley's, she stopped to lunch with Etta, drove in the park with her, and returned home at dinner-time, pledged to repair to her island on a certain day of the following week. A pinch of conscience impelling her to take some one into confidence regarding her rash act of the morning, Sybil had said to Etta, just before they parted:

"Do tell me, dear. If one were in rather a tight place for want of cash—"

"Heavens! is n't everybody?" laughed her friend.

"—do you think there would be any harm in one's—in my letting St. Clair Lewiston lend me a little money?"

"Harm!" replied Etta. "Why, it ought to be squeezed out of him for you, poor shorn lamb!"

"Oh, but he 's offered—no end of things," cried Sybil; "and Peter will take nothing."

"Then Peter gives the supreme evidence that he is



not long for this world. The idea—in your circumstances! Why, my child, you must be poverty-stricken! Of course I'd let St. Clair lend me money. Women's finances have to be 'helped out' now and then. I wish you'd heard Lady Bell's account of the way some of her friends are floated—"

Sybil's color rose. She did not fancy this illustration. Etta had never seemed to her so repellent. But she went home, as has been said, engaged to do the thing she dared not mention to Peter until the time should come.

As Davenant was leaving her for his usual evening of work on the eve of the day she had fixed for her little journey, an impulse of remorse prompted her to run into the hall, and, seizing one button of his coat after a fashion of her own, arrest his progress.

"Peter, tell me, are you going to be busy like this long?"

"I hope two or three days will see me through the woods," he said, but without any of the expressions of tenderness she had looked upon as daily bread. "My dear Sybil, what you have to bear is the lot of most American wives of your class who have working husbands. Do not persuade yourself that you are the only martyr. In a few words, to live as we must live, I must work as I am working. Good night. Keep up your spirits. Soon we shall have our evenings together as before."

But he thought of her often during the evening, and on his way home, earlier than usual, when he passed the Carnifexes' house and saw it still lighted,



conceived the idea of going in to bespeak Agatha's good graces for his wife.

Mr. Carnifex was out at a club dinner, the servant said. Miss Carnifex was in the library, reading. If Mr. Davenant would walk in, Miss Carnifex would no doubt see him, added the man, aware of the family estimate of this visitor.

Agatha, coming down-stairs at once, looked surprised, but pleased, by his late call. Davenant had never been more struck by the serenity of her brow, the charm of her friendly smile. It gave him courage to plunge, with a lack of his usual reticence he could not understand, into a statement of Sybil's case.

"I see exactly," she replied in comment; "and, if you will pardon me, I have been fearing something of this kind. If the poor girl could only look out and above the present, to what you are achieving for her—what she will one day exult in—"

Davenant sighed.

"I am beginning to think that may never be," he said. "I expected too much. I understood too little of woman's nature. I suppose my imagination tried to fit the old-fashioned wife into the new woman's place."

"You are right," she said with a flash of the eye. "Women in these days, although they may not want to vote, want something to satisfy the celestial part of them; and if they are not trained to subsist upon their own intellects must find relief somewhere. But Sybil is too genuine and charming a creature not to be, in the end, all a husband could aspire to possess in his domestic deity. Do you know, I feel guilty at saying this to a man about his wife? And I had



rather say no more. I shall make it my business, though, to seek her companionship oftener, to let her know the real friendship she has made me feel for her."

"You are a friend in a thousand!" he exclaimed impulsively. "I wonder if you 'd mind my saying that every conversation I have had with you has given impetus to the best ambitions of my life?"

Agatha leaned over to draw a lamp-screen between her face and the light that fell upon it. In a jar of deep-red Chinese porcelain behind her had been placed some boughs of dogwood just brought in from the country. About the room were scattered spring blossoms of various kinds, gathered from woods and lawns, and sending forth a fragrance like healthy hope renewed. The sanctuary of Agatha's presence, surrounded and adorned by these emblems, breathed upon Davenant a waft of peace and rest. He continued to talk to her for a while—of himself and his aspirations chiefly, to which point she always led the way. He was flattered to see that she was acquainted with his new prospects, had heard the plaudits of his friends and followers concerning them. From this they went on to unfold common ideas upon political subjects and the future of the country; and at last he took his leave, remembering the hour, and breaking off in the midst of an impatient declaration that all might yet go well with our big-overgrown nation if its governing bodies, in company with the editors of some newspapers, would consent to retire for ten years or so to the Sandwich Islands, or anywhere out of the United States.



He found Sybil awake and up, in a room full of traces of preparation for a journey. An open traveling-trunk stood against the chimney-place, its trays, filled with vaporous garments covered in by tissue-paper, placed here and there, awaiting consignment. A little gray costume that he recognized as one he had been with her to the tailor's to pass upon was spread upon a chair. Even the trim shoes and gaiters to match it were put out. What could this portend?

"My dear child, why are you not asleep?" he said.

"Peter, I did not tell you before, because it was not worth while," she said, with the directness that rarely forsook her. "It would have just produced discussions to embitter our meals—for you know I see you only then. I am going to-morrow to stay with Etta for a week on her island. When I come back, things will go better between us, I hope. I shall feel better—stronger to bear trifles. And you—you will not miss me."

She spoke so quietly that Peter was deceived into believing her indifferent. Wrath rose within him. Apart from the lack of feeling involved, he had never imagined a young wife taking such a step away from her husband.

"This is some of Etta's teaching. It may do for that woman and her 'gang,' but hardly for my wife," he answered angrily, using certain other expressions Sybil had not before heard from his lips.

She turned white, and trembled, but did not reply, while he said his say.

"And if I may ask where you obtained the funds for the expedition," he remarked finally, "I should be



greatly obliged by an answer. It is quite impossible that you go at Mrs. Stanley's expense."

"That is what I feel most badly about," she replied. "I did a foolish thing, Peter, but it did not seem to me a wrong one. After my cousin St. Clair came here one day to insist upon giving me some money from my aunt's estate, and I refused it, I thought I might borrow a little from him for this emergency; so I went to his rooms, and asked him for a check—"

She stopped, quailing. Again that eye of flame, that lowering brow, his face transformed into that of an unsparing judge.

"You—went alone to St. Clair Lewiston's rooms, and asked him—for—a check?" he repeated, the words escaping him in gasps of scornful anger.

"Peter, it was only a hundred dollars. I was sorry, the moment I had done it; but St. Clair is my nearest relative—I did not think—"

"That 's enough. I shall return it to him tomorrow. But I can't undo your going there—worse luck!—any more than I can undo this wish of yours to leave me."

"Do you want me to give this visit up?" she faltered.

"Give it up? No—never. I want you to go. I want you to enjoy yourself in the usual fashion of ladies who weary of their lords' exactions. Understand that you have my full sanction. Put any face you choose on it before the world, and I'll stand by you."

She was bewildered by his sudden change into self-control.



"You mean—you mean—"

"I mean that if you wish to go, I want you to go. That affair about the check has humiliated me so that I have no other feeling left, I think."

He stood moodily gazing into space. She faced him, conscience-stricken, wretched, longing to throw herself upon his neck and pray for pardon, but withal not realizing the force of her offense.

One movement from him toward her, one impulse yielded to by her, might have ended the sad matter. But their eyes stubbornly refused to meet; their hearts, resisting, held apart, while an iron barrier arose between them.

Presently Davenant went into his own room, and closed the door.

The next morning he accompanied his wife to the southward-bound train, putting her, with the maid, into good seats in the drawing-room car, and standing beside them until the signal to leave was about to be given. As he kissed her good-by, Sybil felt terrified by the cold touch of his lips. It was their first parting, and at this moment she would have given all the world not to go. She wished to say so, but his dark face silenced her. When he left the car, she sat still for an instant, then sprang to her feet and ran swiftly toward the door at the end. The narrow passageway was blocked by some people coming in, preceded by the porter with their bags. These proving to be jolly Mrs. Arden and her daughters, Sybil felt glad that Peter had seen them join her. But she resented the interruption that kept her from her husband. Getting at last down upon the steps, she leaned out



eagerly. If Peter had been there, she would have jumped off, fastened herself to his arm, and refused to go back into the car. A passion of love and longing for him absorbed her. Only to see his dear face, only to tell him that she could not live away from him! Straining her gaze over the crowd on the platform, she caught sight at last of Peter, turning to look back, the length of two cars away from her. He saw her, lifted his hat. Sybil, beside herself with emotion, was about to spring from the step to run in pursuit of him, when the train moved. A last flying figure, coming to board it, forced her back, the porter behind her aiding to draw her into the doorway. To Sybil's utter dismay, this last arrival, whom her husband must have distinctly seen, was the man he hated—Lang!

DAVENANT stood staring after the train till it had passed out of the long tunnel of the station and become a speck in the distance. He then fell into line with the crowd incessantly surging over the gang-planks of ferry-boats, and crossed the river, returning to his office. Late in the evening he reached home, after stopping for a Bohemian dinner in a restaurant rather than at his club, where people might speak to him of her. The little house, which, in spite of its incompleteness as a home, was yet eloquent of her, was like a face with eyes shut. All up-stairs was silent and dreary. Down below, where they were yet unaware of the master's return, the servants were celebrating their free evening with hilarity. Upon a card-receiver on the hall table he



saw the yellow envelop of a telegram. It was unsigned, but the contents left him no room to doubt the sender.

What you saw last took me by surprise as much as you. If you say, come, will return to-morrow.

"I shall not say come," he muttered between clenched teeth. "She must come, as she chose to leave me, of her own accord."

He went up to his study, a place where his books, as usual, overflowed, and where Sybil had insisted upon making things "look as they used to do in the happy days when Peter was a bachelor." Up on the top of a bookcase stood the cast of Nike Dipteros he had purchased the spring before because it reminded him of her. The inspiration of the noble form, with its fluttering, wind-filled drapery, and glorious wings outspread, appealed to him with its eternal message to rejoice in victory achieved—then sent him into lower depths of gloom! What had been his victory?

He looked into Sybil's chamber, turning from the threshold, aghast at its emptiness. A pair of embroidered slippers he had bought for her in the bazaar at Smyrna remained upon the fluffy mat before her dressing-table. Vividly he recalled that bright day's ramble, in the little Turkish town, of two happy, enamoured people, laughing at everything for very joy of existence. A strip of rare old Rhodian embroidery across her table brought back Athens, and the dusky shop crammed with curios where they had chaffered, Sybil carrying off this bit hugged to



her breast in the rapture of possession. His own portrait, in a triptych of enamel purchased in Naples as they were sailing for America, looked at him from the mantel. This Peter closed with a snap, covering his handsome features out of sight. He could not endure their joyous look, for the picture had been taken to please her, in Paris, upon their arrival out.

Poor Davenant, deciding he could stand no more of it, hurried down-stairs. In the act of issuing from his door he was intercepted by Katrina Grantham and Agatha Carnifex, accompanied by Jim Grantham, the lively lad who had steered Peter's canoe straight into the jaws of danger on Lake Pocasset.

"Consider us country cousins," said Mrs. Grantham, "come with our knitting to sit awhile with Sybil, if she will have us."

"Pray come into the drawing-room," answered Davenant, who still retained some of his Southern spirit of formal hospitality. "I am only too sorry that Sybil left town this morning—for—er—a brief jaunt to the South. She had an opportunity—Mrs. Arden and her daughters—a change of air necessary—my wife has not been quite herself."

He spoke bravely, but could not hide his wound from Agatha. At once his friend divined what had happened, or at least saw that a painful crisis had been reached in the affairs of the couple about whom she had been thinking continuously since his visit to her the night before.

"You are going out? We will not detain you, then," said Mrs. Grantham, blankly. She was really distressed. Although knowing far less of the real



state of affairs than Agatha, she was too clever a woman not to see that something had gone seriously wrong between her protégés. But upon Davenant's urging them to remain awhile, the party sat talking—Jim, driven to looking at photographs, wishing himself back in the canoe on Lake Pocasset.

Peter knew this visit was prompted by Agatha's kind feeling. He wished heartily that it had occurred the night previous. The still house as he had just found it made him realize what Sybil's vigils must have been while he had been away toiling up Fortune's ladder for her sake. When, for a moment, he took Jim up-stairs to present him with an Oriental dagger brought home from their travels, Katrina looked at Agatha, and whispered:

"My dear, this is gruesome! Davenant's eyes reveal everything. How could she have gone off there with Etta's fine party, and left him in this dismal house, all stuffed with other people's dingy furniture—just on the eve of his ordeal, too? The way he has worked his affair up is a marvel. My husband says it is a real triumph of a sane man over a bridegroom. And to-morrow's Davenant's great day in court. If he wins this suit it will mean everything to him—everything! I don't believe Sybil knew how much is involved; but why she did n't know is something I cannot understand."

Agatha was spared answering by Jim Grantham's voice, over the stairs, calling:

"Mother, come up here a minute. I want to show you some bully Turkish knives."

Katrina obeyed, smiling. As she lingered with her



lad, looking over Davenant's little collection of arms upon the wall of his study, the host came again down-stairs.

"You have guessed, I see," he said in a rapid, agitated voice. "To no other person could I betray myself. A blow like this numbs. I can't say I'm suffering. I'm stunned."

The soothing, protecting impulse ever uppermost in Miss Carnifex toward afflicted humanity stood her in good stead now. With her own heart racked by his sorrow, yet warmed by ardent sympathy, she spoke cheerfully:

"I can't advise you not to mind it, for I know you. But I do honestly believe you magnify things. Her going was a mistake, a misfortune, no matter what led to it. Don't justify yourself or her to me. I think only kind things of both of you; and I am sure this will come out right."

"It is a horror for a man to doubt so soon that his wife's love will stand the strain marriage must put on it; to have seen it give way in the first test; to know that the influence of others—triflers—is so much stronger than his—"

"Hush, hush!" said his friend. "Leave others out of the question. Let your universe be filled with you and one other."

"Ah, but you have not loved!" he exclaimed.

Agatha did not stir or speak. Gradually the influence of her calm extended to him.

"I begin to feel hypnotized," he said with a half-smile. "You are controlling me somehow."

"Then obey the medium's behest," she answered.



"In whatever way you do it, communicate at once with Sybil. Let her feel your forgiveness."

Jim Grantham, arriving at the foot of the stairs by the simple process of sliding down the banisters, here appeared, followed more leisurely by his mama. Katrina, declaring they must no longer keep Mr. Davenant from his affairs, wished him good night, adding her kindest hopes for his success in the courtroom on the morrow.

"And yours, too? May I think of you as wishing me to trounce my adversaries?" asked Davenant, clasping Agatha's hand as she was about to leave.

"Oh, I am always to be counted upon," she said lightly; but in the dim light of the hall he saw in her deep and steadfast eyes a vision of what might have been had not the "ministers that feed Love's mighty flame" led his feet into another path.

Under the weight of thoughts and feelings which this day and evening had laid upon him, Peter went out and walked for a while in the starlight, pondering upon past and future. Then, returning to his study cheered and strengthened, he sat down to his table, and poured into a letter to Sybil the full tide of his love for her, that, whether for good or ill, would always be the supreme passion of his life. Sealing and stamping this important missive, he went out again to a post-box at the corner, and deposited it, feeling a sense of exquisite relief.

THE next day Davenant appeared in court in the plenitude of his remarkable powers. His brilliant, almost audacious, management of his case was a



matter of universal comment. Among the jaded souls who wait, generally in vain, upon forensic eloquence in modern court-rooms, there was only one opinion as to his surety of success. He went out of the scene of his triumph walking upon air. This triumph, like all he owned besides, should go to her—to her.

He reached home later than usual in the evening, expecting to dress and dine with a friend. He did not know that during the last two or three hours messengers with notes had been in search of him down-town and at his various clubs, and, having failed to find him, had returned the notes to his own house, whence they had been originally sent out.

Davenant's first sight of his front door revealed a doctor's brougham, then another, passing and repassing before it. He wondered who was ill in the next house, then reflected that he did not even know who lived in the next house. When he put his key in the latch and opened his familiar portal, his nostrils were saluted by the strong smell of ether.

Some one came down to meet him. It was Agatha. She took him by the hand, and drew him into the drawing-room, where she had left him, inspired with happiness, the night before.

"Sybil has been hurt," she said. "She arrived in Jersey City at four-fifteen, and, after crossing the river, took a hansom, with her maid, to come up-town. There was a collision with a loaded truck. The maid was not injured, but Sybil got a blow. The maid brought her directly here, and sent for us. The doctors are both with her now, and the surgical operation is over safely."



"Sybil is hurt—the surgical operation is over—the doctors are with her now," kept on ringing in Peter's brain. Agatha lifted his hand again, which she had dropped.

"They cannot tell how it will come out, but there is hope, of course," she said forlornly, keeping back her tears. "Katrina Grantham is with her. Do you wish to go up?"

Davenant looked at her with haggard eyes, then bounded up the stairs.

For hours he watched by Sybil's beautiful, inanimate form. Then the physicians, taking him in charge, declared there was likely to be no immediate change, and urged him to get food and rest. Food he accepted, but of rest there could be none till he was assured of better things. In the middle of the night one of the doctors came down to tell him that his wife was holding her own, and gave him stronger hope of improvement; then, struck by his dazed, pallid looks, advised him to go outside and rid his lungs of the drug-laden atmosphere of the house.

"There can be no reason to keep you here—no reason why you may not get a breath of air," he added with assurance.

Davenant, obeying mechanically, found himself straying like a lost dog into a square not far from home, where he dropped upon a bench. A tramp napping near him excited his envy. "*He* has not left at home, in extremity, one dearer than are the ruddy drops that visit his sad heart," murmured Peter. The situation recalled like a flash the occasion of that other nocturnal adventure of his, in



Washington Square, on the night of Mrs. Crawford's party, when he had watched Sybil trip down her aunt's steps, and had ventured to join her. The thought of her light, graceful movements, now stilled in suffering, was like a goad, driving him home again. He could not go fast enough. He wondered why he had consented to put so many steps between him and his darling. By this time she might be worse !

In a cold sweat of terror, he began to run. A policeman, making after him, seized him by the arm. When he saw Davenant's face, the man instinctively recognized that it was grief, not evil, that inspired the fugitive.

"My wife is very ill," said Davenant, babbling like a child. "I am going home to look after her."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the officer, touching his hat. "I hope you 'll find your lady better when you get there."

Davenant resumed his mad career. At the corner, whence he could see his own house, he noticed that the lights in Sybil's room, hitherto bright, had been darkened.

"Has it come, then ?" he groaned, trying to nerve himself.

At the turning of the lock, Agatha was again before him ; but for blind grief he could not see her face.

"Hush," she said tenderly. "Sybil has gone to sleep. She aroused once, asked for you, and is doing well. One of the doctors has gone home ; the other is watching by her."

Davenant, treading noiselessly, went up-stairs to



the open door of his wife's bedroom. As he did so, the doctor, who was lying back dozing in the arm-chair of the little study at the rear, started awake, got upon his feet, and coming toward him, wrung his hand.

"Your wife will live, Mr. Davenant," he said with manly sympathy.

"Will live!" Ah, blessed words! Who that ever heard them will not recognize the hand stretched out to rescue a shuddering wretch on the verge of falling into a gulf? Peter for the first time felt the tears rain down his cheeks. Passing in to where she lay sweetly slumbering, Katrina, the nurse, and Sybil's maid all withdrew to give place to him. When alone with his beloved, he threw himself upon his knees beside the bed, and prayed. *De profundis* he arose upon wings of victory.

KATRINA GRANTHAM, who had known many disappointments in her attempts to turn the course of other people's true love into a channel opened for it by herself, was destined, during the ensuing year, to encounter a supreme surprise. Just when Katrina had picked out for Agatha Carnifex a new and appropriate suitor—could he only be made to see it—in the person of a distinguished bachelor of highest rank in the legal world, and of ample means, Agatha announced her engagement with Hamilton Ainslie. Ainslie, who had laboriously acquired a zest for American business life, and even a faint Yankee accent (dropped when he forgot about it), was now vaguely spoken of as "in coffee," and doing extremely



well. He certainly had every reason to consider himself in luck as well as coffee, thought his friends; and of these none were warmer in congratulation of the affianced pair than Sybil and Peter Davenant.

The latter couple, now established in the former dwelling of Sybil's aunt, were enabled to encounter their increased expenses in that comfortable establishment by the help of the money coming to Sybil, with the house, by the death at Schwalbach, "suddenly," of Mr. St. Clair Lewiston. With all Peter's high-minded renunciation of a share of Mrs. Lewiston's fortune in her son's lifetime, he had no valid excuse for refusing it under the present circumstances.

Mrs. Grantham, at last accounts, was bemoaning her sad lot because an excellent young man had presented himself for Katty—Katty having coincidentally announced herself in favor of the excellent young man. But as that mother, like many another in similar case, would have been more unhappy had there been no husband in store for her charming and winsome daughter, Mowbray Grantham reserved his decision when called on for sympathy in her woes. And then, also, he bethought him that, Katty being married, he might hope for a reasonable share of his wife's company once more.

Mrs. Stanley shut up her various houses in America, and, with Jack and others, went to Europe for a year of "rest." Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, finding it impossible to support the cares of existence in *their* new house, sold it, with furniture, rugs, curtains, objects of art, and all pictures excepting the portrait of Mrs. Willoughby by Carolus. (That was boxed.) The



Willoughbys had, in fact, become convinced that the only way for good Americans to live is in knocking around Europe. They kept the *Almée*—sending her from port to port of desirable resorts, and meeting her by rail. Mrs. Willoughby's parties of pleasure in smooth waters, upon her "princely yacht," became matters of international importance, Mrs. Stanley quite meekly attending one of them at Nice, and being glad to get a card for it. After the Stanleys' own yacht arrived out, there was a lively competition between the two American queens as to who should excel in extending hospitalities by which people of some of the greatest names in aristocratic England profited.

The mischievous Miss Hilton had nervous prostration for a while, then married a mercantile gentleman residing in Shanghai, who admires literary taste in women, and gives her a very good establishment on the Bubbling Well Road.

Sybil saw Ian Cameron when that noble Scot brought his wife out for a bridal journey to the States; and Cameron found his old sweetheart not only lovelier than ever, but a more contented daughter of the Great Republic than most of the women he saw about her. Mr. Mortimer has been too busy, since Sybil failed him, to know whether he minded it or not. And lastly, Lang, the brief disturbing element of Davenant's life, married a wealthy widow from the mining districts of Pennsylvania, whom he met on an Atlantic liner, crossing. They live in one of the new Avenues in Paris, and the tendency of his lady's too well-grown son to call Lang "popper," in public, occasions his chief annoyance.























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